PS3 PlayStation 3 | PSP PlayStation Portable | PlayStation 2

PlayStation® The Official Magazine

Issue 042 February 2011

GAME OF THE YEAR! AWARDS

TITANIC TERROR!

SHADOWS OF THE DAMNED

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 42 (February 2011)

L.A. NOIRE

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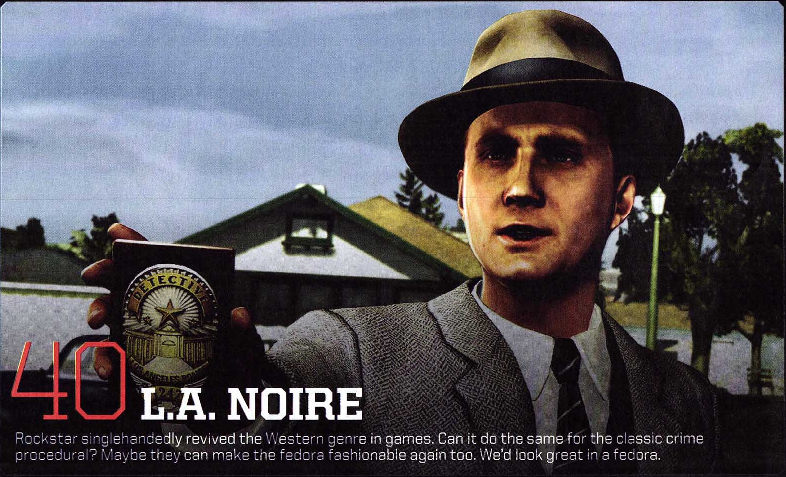
FEBRUARY 2011

COVER FEATURE



40 L.A. NOIRE

Rockstar singlehandedly revived the Western genre in games. Can it do the same for the classic crime procedural? Maybe they can make the fedora fashionable again too. We'd look great in a fedora.

ON THE COVER

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From the makers of GTA and Red Dead Redemption
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So many great PlayStation games; how can we possibly pick just one? We manage.

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Shadows looks like a hell of a game. But hell, we just like being able to say *hell* in the mag.

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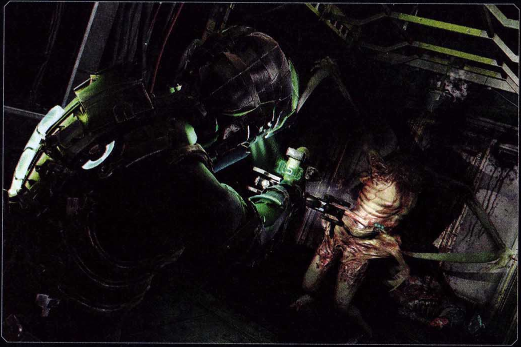

72 DEAD SPACE 2
We love playing *Dead Space* games. We love eating meat. But for some reason, we don't like doing both at the same time. Maybe we should become vegans.

Thank you little one! Things are getting back to normal already.

78 LITTLEBIGPLANET 2
We're using *LBP2* to create a Sackmachine that can knock out this mag every month.

Get Real

Perhaps it's time for me to finally embrace reality

For much of my adult life, I've had a problem with reality. And though my wife would likely be delighted to hear me finally admit what she's suspected for so many years, let me quickly clarify: I'm talking, my dear Michele, about realism in games, not at home.

Oh, sure, there's a place for reality. Sports games, for example. Or war games, like the recent *Call of Duty* releases, with their bloody, brutal, unrelenting combat—perfect examples of reality done right.

When it comes to the rest of gaming, however, I've always favored variety over verisimilitude. I'd gladly take a smaller polygon count if it means a more creative approach to world design. I don't care if a protagonist is slightly out of proportion, as long as he looks cool. I'd much rather see something I can't find in my everyday life, because that's exactly why I play games: as an engrossing escape to an exciting new world.

Then along came *Heavy Rain,* and everything changed for me. Here was realism I could get behind, because it was in the service of something bigger than just copying the world around it. The game used realistic graphics to get to something deeper—an exploration of the choices we'd make when faced with an impossible, unwinnable situation.

And now we have *L.A. Noire.* Forget motion capture; this game has motion *scanning,* using a brand-new proprietary tech that aims to recreate the small gestures, the subtle nuances, the emotion-driven ticks and quirks. But like *Heavy Rain,* it's being done with style, with story, and with a creativity that goes far beyond mere mimickry. It's shaping up to be one of the most exciting games of 2011, and it's likely to be the only hyper-realistic game I'll personally love this year—reason enough for it to grace this month's cover.

GARY

Gary Steinman
Editor in Chief
twitter.com/TinyManRages

Gary Steinman
Editor in Chief

When Mongols invaded, Gary Steinman made them wait 40 minutes while he ate toffee. Then, he pointed to his elbow and the Mongols exploded. This issue is full of good stuff, he promises, and also maybe Mongol parts.

Ken Bousquet
Art Director

The art in this here publication pours forth sweet and clear from the mind and hands of "Mister" Ken Bousquet. Ken, we suspect, is also behind the awesomeness of puppies and deliciousness of pizza, but we can't be sure.

Scott Butterworth
Assistant Editor

Camel-pummeling soldier of good fortune Scott Butterworth promises the sun will come out tomorrow. If he feels like it, that is. Which, of course, is unlikely because you were mean to your cat Mr. Snookles.

Greg Orlando
Executive Editor

Not to unduly alarm anyone, but Greg Orlando went to lunch in October and has yet to return with our pork rinds and corn nuts. It's a tragic circumstance, as we could really go for some corn nuts right now. Mmm. Corn.

Roger Burchill
Managing Editor

Roger Burchill *can* believe I Can't Believe It's Not Butter is, in fact, not butter. Just ask him and he will affirm I Can't Believe It's Not Butter is not, by any measurable means, butter. He is the greatest man we will ever know.

Anne Lewis
AKA Scaldy McPained

Forsaken by the American higher education system, Anne Lewis sought enlightenment among the PTOM staff. And she just may find it, provided she can survive the intern-eating wombats and exhumes our former interns...

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The Official Magazine

EDITORIAL
Editor in Chief Gary Steinman
Executive Editor Greg Orlando
Managing Editor Roger Burchill
Assistant Editor Scott Butterworth
Intern Anne Lewis
Editorial Contributors Matt Cabral, Jason D'Aprile, Mitch Dyer, Russ Garbutt, Henry Gilbert, Cathryn Gudmundson, Andrew Hayward, Nathan Meunier, Mikel Reparaz, Evan Shamoon, Jarik Sikat

ART
Art Director Ken Bousquet
Designer Christin Chi
Creative Director Chris Imlay

BUSINESS
Publisher Kristen Salvatore
ksalvatore@futureus.com
Vice President/Games Kelley Corten
kcorten@futureus.com
Vice President/Sales & Marketing Rachelle Considine
Executive Director Integrated Sales Nate Hunt
415-269-5408, nhunt@futureus.com
National Sales Manager – Key Accounts Isaac Ugay
949-305-0767, iugay@futureus.com
Regional Sales Director Carol Gillard
646-723-5476, cgillard@futureus.com
Regional Sales Manager Arthur St. Germain
650-238-2571, astgermain@futureus.com
Detriot Consumer Manager Alan Dickinson
248-792-2408, alandmedia@comcast.net
Account Executive Allyson Kardel
650-745-9229, akardel@futureus.com
Advertising Coordinator Heidi Hapin
hhapin@futureus.com
Senior Marketing Manager Andrea Recio-Ang
arecio-ang@futureus.com

PRODUCTION
Production Director Michael Hollister
Production Manager Larry Briseno
Senior Production Coordinator Dan Mallory
Print Order Coordinator Jennifer Lim

CONSUMER MARKETING
Vice President/Consumer Marketing Rich McCarthy
Circulation Director Stephanie Blake
Newsstand Director Bill Shewey
Consumer Marketing Operations Director Lisa Radler
Sr. Online Consumer Marketing Manager Jennifer Trinkner
Customer Service Manager Mike Frassica

FUTURE US, Inc.
4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400
South San Francisco, CA 94080
www.futureus.com

President John Marcom
Vice President/CFO John Sutton
General Counsel Anne Ortel
Human Resources Director Nancy Durlester DuBois

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Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).

FUTURE PLC
30 Monmouth St., Bath, Avon, BA1 2BW, England
Tel +44 1225 442244
www.futureplc.com

Non-executive Chairman: Roger Parry
Chief Executive: Stevie Spring
Group Finance Director: John Bowman

CUSTOMER SERVICE: PlayStation: The Official Magazine Customer Care, PO Box 5154, Harlan, IA 51593-0654. Phone: 1-800-477-0484. Web: www.playstationthemagazine.com/customerservice. Email: playstation@cdsfulfillment.com. Back issues can be purchased by calling 1-800-865-7240. REPRINTS: Reprint Management Service. Phone: 717-399-1900 x.100.

PLAYSTATION: THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE (ISSN: 1941-5303) is published 13 times a year, monthly plus Holiday issue following December issue, by Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com. Periodicals postage paid in South San Francisco, CA, and at additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by Time Warner Retail. Subscriptions: One year basic rate (12 issues) US: $18.00, Canada: US$26.00. Canadian orders must be prepaid. Canadian price includes postage and GST (GST #R128220688). PMA #40612608. Prepaid in US funds only. Subscriptions do not include newsstand specials. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to PlayStation: The Official Magazine, P.O. Box 5154, Harlan, IA 51593-0654. Ride-along Enclosure: None. Standard Mail enclosure: None. Returns: Bleuchip International, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Future US, Inc. also publishes Maximum PC, Mac|Life Nintendo Power, PC Gamer, The Official Xbox Magazine, World of Warcraft Official Magazine, NVISION, Guitar World, Revolver, Guitar Aficionado, Windows: The Official Magazine, MOM, Crochet Today! and Pregnancy.

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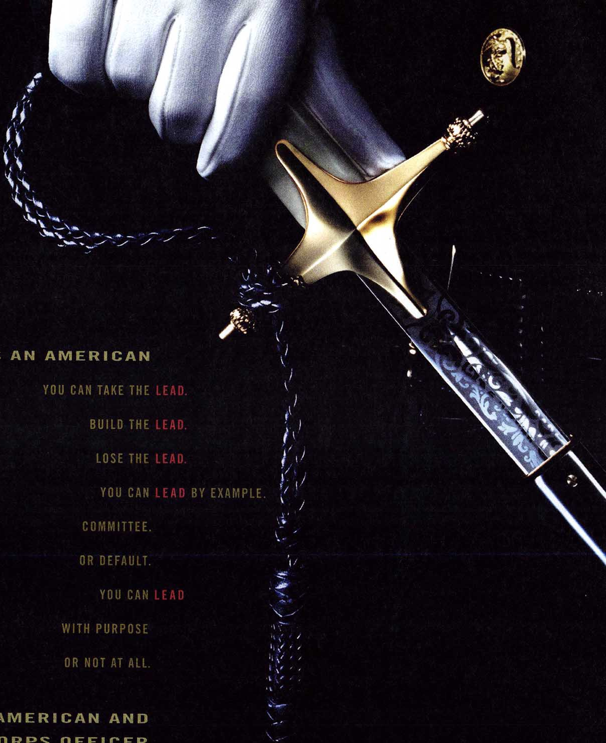

AS AN AMERICAN

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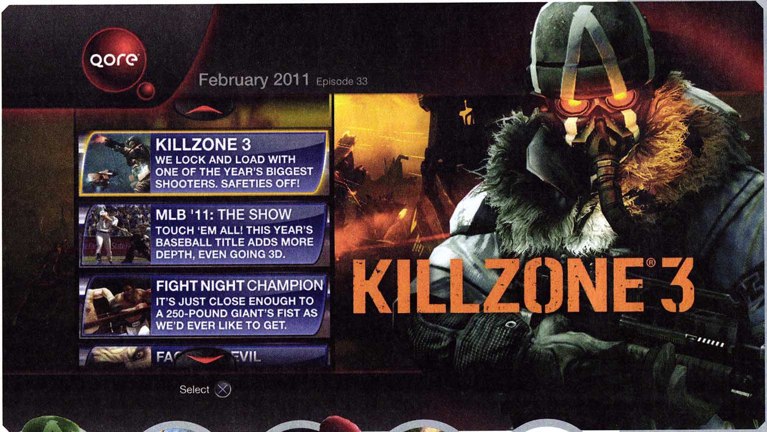
Inside Qore Episode 33

Killzone 3 puts the "harm" in "third time's a charm"

If a Helghast pops out from behind a barrel and sees his shadow, that means six more weeks of apocalyptic *Killzone 3* winter. We dive into this tense, exciting action game to reveal its frosty secrets. Then, the inevitable spring thaw draws the boys of summer out of hibernation; we take a swing at *MLB 11: The Show,* visiting the San Diego developer. In a more solitary sport, we rumble with *Fight Night Champion.* And know your enemy to beat him with our list of the best PS3 villains ever.

VERONICA BELMONT HOST OF QORE

Available 2/1/2011 on the PlayStation® Network



February 2011 Episode 33

KILLZONE 3
WE LOCK AND LOAD WITH ONE OF THE YEAR'S BIGGEST SHOOTERS. SAFETIES OFF!

MLB '11: THE SHOW
TOUCH 'EM ALL! THIS YEAR'S BASEBALL TITLE ADDS MORE DEPTH, EVEN GOING 3D.

FIGHT NIGHT CHAMPION
IT'S JUST CLOSE ENOUGH TO A 250-POUND GIANT'S FIST AS WE'D EVER LIKE TO GET.

Killzone 3
The Helghan Empire is at war with itself, so regroup and strike back while you can!

MLB 11: The Show
Pitchers can duel, teasing those over-hyped sluggers. Belly-itchers should see a dermatologist.

Fight Night Champion
Shuck and jive. Float and sting. Dance with your opponent before landing the haymaker and calling it a night.

Faces of Evil
We select our favorite bad guys from some of the best games on PS3. Do you love to hate them as much as we do?

Upcoming Blu-ray and Games releases
Audrey has the hottest Blu-rays this month!

Qore is free to PlayStation Plus subscribers.

Individual episodes can be purchased for $2.99 and a 13-episode subscription can be purchased for $24.99. Qore subscribers have access to Betas, demos, themes, and additional downloadable content each month.

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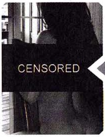
- Sports Marketing & Media
- Web Design & Development

The PlayStation Entertainment Plan

Fill up your life with our monthly guide

MONDAY
TUESDAY
WEDNESDAY
THURSDAY
FRIDAY
SATURDAY
SUNDAY



FEB. 01

Working Naked Day

What a great way to start February—by getting fired.

02

Groundhog Day

It seems perfectly logical to base our seasonal predictions on a rodent. No, that's not weird at all.

03

Chinese New Year

2011 is the Year of the Rabbit. Fun fact: Charlize Theron was born in the Year of the Rabbit, so please to enjoy a sexy picture of her.

06

Super Bowl XLV

We're already taking bets on who will be in the Super Bowl this year. It's a pity none of us know which teams are good.

09

Assume the Party Escort Submission Position

Portal 2 hits shelves today, so we decided to build a Portal Gun. But the people we're testing it on keep disappearing.

12

Abe Lincoln's Birthday

Ten score and two years ago, Abraham Lincoln was born. Because of that, the banks are closed today.

13

Get a Different Name Day

Tired of your old name? Today's the day to get a new one! We're thinking something badass, like Fisticuffs Q. Explodington.

14

St. Valentine's Day

The sight of all these pink hearts is making us want to vomit. Or perhaps that's all the candy we bought ourselves.

15

Beatdowns

Marvel vs. Capcom 3 and *LEGO Star Wars III* are both in stores.

16

Gary Steinman's Birthday

Our Master and Commander turns 25 again this year and he demands all of our undying loyalty. Also, cake and expensive gifts.

18

Planet Pluto Discovered

On this day in 1930, Clyde Tombaugh discovered what would be known as the planet Pluto. Too bad the planet part didn't stick.

19

Bon Scott's Death

Thirty years ago we lost the singer behind Highway to Hell, AC/DC's first album to make the Top 100. This rock legend is missed by many.

HELLO
my name is
AWESOME

22

Bulletstorm Drops

If Epic Games has taught us anything, it's there is no such thing as over-the-top violence. For this, we are thankful.

PS3
BULLETSTORM

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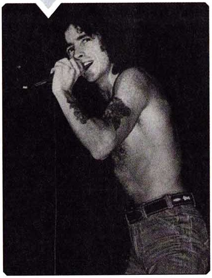
No Rush to Die

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issues a fatwa on author Salman Rushdie. Rushdie not only survives but lives to love one of the finest woman ever.



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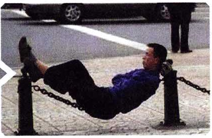
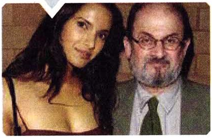
Public Sleeping Day

We were going to celebrate this by sleeping at work, but seeing as how we do that on a regular basis anyways, it really doesn't seem like celebrating.





TEEN

T

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Just like movies, **every game has a rating.** And those ratings come from the **ESRB.**

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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

Oh, Lara!
Our favorite gaming mistress returns in 2011's hottest reboot.

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Brain Drain
The essential intel to survive COD: Black Ops' zombie onslaught.

»Page 14

More Massive
Hey, who invited the aliens? The war hits home in Mass Effect 3.

»Page 19

Mr. Manners
PlayStation's Jeff Rubenstein on dealing with online offenders.

»Page 20

The Great Debate
SSX or SS-suX? We face off on the new direction.

» Page 22

1 Desert Heat

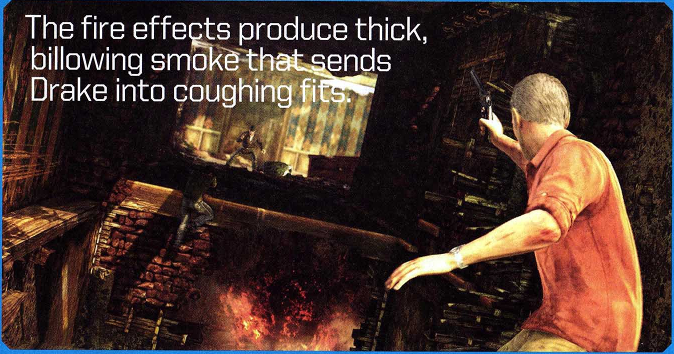
Naughty Dog reveals Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

Uncharted 3 takes players to the Rub' al Khali desert, otherwise known as the Empty Quarter. Covering a quarter-million square miles on the Arabian Peninsula, it's among the largest deserts in the world. "It's one of the last great unexplored frontiers on the planet Earth and since we already had the idea of setting part of our game in the desert, it was a tempting location to visit from the beginning," says lead game designer Richard Lemarchand. "When Amy [Hennig, creative director and head writer] stumbled across the real-life historical rumors of a lost city somewhere in the Empty Quarter, she began to put big pieces of the puzzle into place."

T. E. Lawrence, the British explorer, army officer, and archeologist (and better known as Lawrence of Arabia), spent much of his life looking for the lost city, which also proved valuable inspiration for the development team. "So we suddenly had a vast, inhospitable region of the globe, a whole mysterious city lost somewhere within it, and a real-life explorer in whose footprints we could follow—a set of opportunities that was too good to pass up!" says Lemarchand.

Our live demonstration of the game takes place in a dilapidated chateau, where Drake and his partner, Victor Sullivan, are searching for a clue to the lost city. When Drake spots some assailants preparing to torch the place, things quickly go to 11, and Drake spends the next 10 or so minutes showing off his new slate of moves and animations. Melee attacks, for one, are infinitely more varied: Using an array of brawling tactics, he's able to rip guns from enemies' hands, land vicious head butts, and fight multiple enemies at once. Drake uses stealth to drop down and incapacitate one guard and blasts his way out of situations when necessary. While it isn't shown in our demo, Drake will be able to weaponize elements of his environment as well, with beer bottles given as the example.

The demo provides an ample demonstration of the game's fire effects, which overwhelm the ruined chateau and produce thick, billowing smoke that sends Drake into coughing fits. Drake's expanding climbing techniques also come to the fore and at one point he launches onto a chandelier to traverse a particularly intimidating chasm, which slowly and realistically tears from the ceiling with the added weight. It's all part of a move toward more contextual animations and richly interactive environments that help create a more compelling, more realistic experience.



The fire effects produce thick, billowing smoke that sends Drake into coughing fits.

Elemental, Dear Watson

Sand, unsurprisingly, will be a significant aspect of *Uncharted 3*, but exactly how it will be incorporated into gameplay still remains a mystery. Lemarchand left us with this tidbit: "We've already cooked up a sequence that revolves around displacing large volumes of sand, in a way that tips the odds in Drake's favor. I'll have to leave the details up to your imagination..."

"We've always seen animation as a great opportunity to ground our characters," says Lemarchand. "Everyone knows what a human being looks like as they move around and so when we set out to create Nathan Drake's move set, we deliberately gave him lots of detail and variety in his animation, and tried to make him move like a regular person. He stumbles or hesitates sometimes and transitions in a very believable way between his animations, but without ever negatively affecting the responsiveness of the controls."

2 Back to Basics

Lara Croft's origins take center stage in a grittier Tomb Raider reboot

Gaming's leading lady might've gone small in *Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light*, but that wasn't her biggest surprise. As its subtitle-free title implies, *Tomb Raider* is a true reboot—a fresh start for a franchise that has faced notable struggles in its evolution. *Tomb Raider* recasts Croft as a 21-year-old novice seeking to establish herself as an adventurer—a far cry from the confident, experienced, and battle-hardened heroine we've come to know and love.

When the salvage ship she commandeers crashes during a voyage to the coast of Japan, she finds herself battling for survival on an island occupied by aggressive natives and limited resources. Due to her rookie status, Lara begins the adventure with a limited skill set, but she's a quick learner: as the campaign unfolds, she'll become stronger and more agile, and thus able to access areas of the island that were previously out of reach. And to further create the sensation of surviving in a desperate situation, Croft will need to carefully use and combine items to traverse the dangerous environments and solve physics-oriented puzzles.

Perhaps most surprising of all is that *Tomb Raider* is aiming for a Mature rating, with a quest that demonstrates the sometimes traumatic toll of fending for one's self in a brutal and unfamiliar setting. Here's hoping Crystal Dynamics' fresh stab reestablishes the brand as one of the best in gaming when Square Enix releases it later this year.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

3 Fundead

Survive rounds 30, 40, and beyond in Call Of Duty: Black Ops' Zombie mode with these helpful tips from Treyarch's Ryan Higa

Jay2nin
+130
500
500
+60
880
7/32

The Basics Above all else, conserving ammo is key in Zombie matches. Stick close to your teammates unless you're covering various entry points (but even then, be sure to stay in the same room). Though zombies and shotguns tend to go hand in hand, automatic weapons are generally more useful. Avoid the weapons in the starting room if you can—hold out for the submachine guns in the second room instead.

Left Undead With each successive round, the zombie horde grows not only larger but stronger as well. However, a new round won't begin until all zombies from the previous round have been eliminated. By keeping the last remaining zombie alive for as long as possible, you'll give your team a chance to restock and prepare for the next wave of the onslaught.

Home Room On Kino Der Toten, wait as long as possible before opening doors, especially at the beginning. But always keep enough money to buy the next door so you can escape if necessary. On Five, it's generally best to get to the bottom as quickly as possible because the rooms are designed to be pretty defendable. Plus, both the power switch and the mystery box are located there.

Dead Ahead For the first four to seven rounds, get as many melee kills as possible to maximize your points. Get three or four shots in and then stab your target for the actual kill. After that, start to go for headshots whenever possible. Headshots aren't going to kill zombies right away, but they're going to generate a lot of points. And getting headshot *kills* and utilizing traps are the best ways to rack up points and stay alive as you progress.

Gun Game Anything you get from the mystery box will be better than any purchasable weapon, so keep hitting it until every member of your team has one if not two high-powered weapons. It's also the only way to obtain specialty weapons like the Thunder Gun, Ray Gun, and Freeze Gun. Once you flip the power back on, keep an eye on the light bulb-covered boards on Kino Der Toten and the TV monitors on Five in order to locate the randomly spawning box.

Knock Out The Pack-a-Punch machine—which increases every weapon's clip size and damage—is essential for long-term survival. On Kino Der Toten, link the teleporter and warp to the projection room. On Five, activate the four "Defcon" signs and locate the portal that opens up. While you're at it, pick up a few perks as well, especially Juggernaut.

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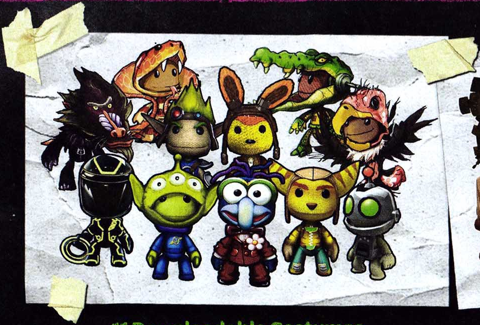
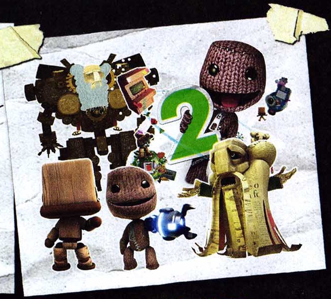


11 Downloadable Costumes



5 PSN Avatars

Available November 16th

RATING PENDING
RP
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PlayStation 3

PlayStation Network

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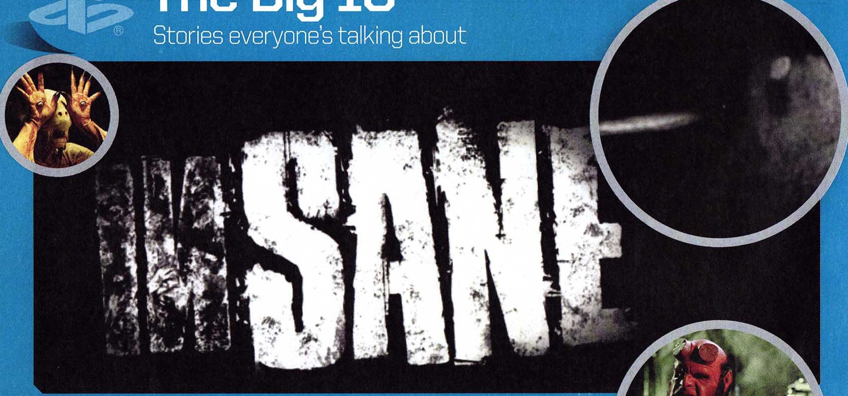


5 Bad Dreams

Film director Guillermo del Toro signs on for a trio of games for THQ

Dream Weaver
Director Guillermo del Toro's filmography reflects an eclectic mix of commercial and artistic films done independently and with studios. Notable works include *Cronos* (1993), *Blade II* (2002), *Hellboy* and *Hellboy II* (2004, 2008), and the Academy Award winning *Pan's Labyrinth*. His next movie project, *Frankenstein*, is slated for a 2012 release.

THQ chose the Spike VGAs to reveal one of the industry's best-known secrets: that it has partnered with film director Guillermo del Toro *(Pan's Labyrinth, Hellboy)* on not just a single game but an entire trilogy. The teaser trailer for the upcoming *inSANE* quite clearly communicates "horror," and del Toro will be working with THQ studio Volition *(Saints Row, Red Faction)* on development. His role will be that of an "external creative director" for the games and he'll collaborate on special projects; while THQ will retain all rights to the games, del Toro will have the rights to any "filmed entertainment products." The first chapter is slated to launch sometime in 2013.

This is not, of course, the first time a high-profile movie director has set his sights on videogames, nor the first time a publisher has put its faith in a director's vision. Most famous, perhaps, was Steven Spielberg's project *LMNO* with Electronic Arts—a game that was, ultimately, cancelled several years into development. Big-name directors like James Cameron, Peter Jackson, Gore Verbinski, and most recently Christopher Nolan have all expressed interest in exploring the medium. (Nolan recently confirmed that an *Inception* game is in the works and that he'll be involved in its creation.)

Del Toro has long been a proponent of videogames. Like Peter Jackson, he's known to be an avid gamer himself, having expressed a particular fondness for the likes of *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus*. "Videogames are the comic books of our time," he said at a book reading in Portland, Ore., last year. "It's a medium that gains no respect among the intelligentsia. They say, 'Oh, videogames.' And most people that complain about videogames have never f–king played them. They are an art form and anyone saying differently is a little out of touch."

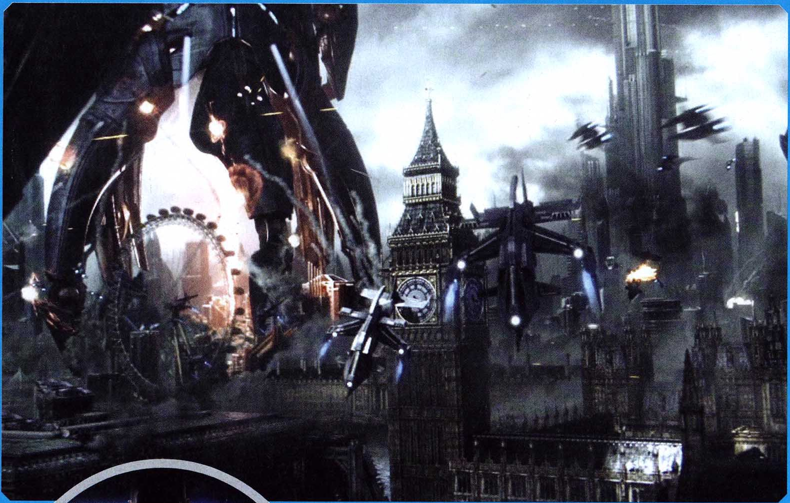
The move comes as part of a larger shift toward fewer, higher-quality titles at THQ. Several months back, the studio unveiled its new Montreal studio, which will be helmed by Patrice Désilets, best known for his work on Ubisoft's *Prince of Persia* and *Assassin's Creed* franchises.

It's okay to be excited about this collaboration; del Toro is extremely talented and his long-held interest in the medium is heartening. But let's not mistake enthusiasm for success. In comments to *Develop* magazine, *BioShock* creator Ken Levine recalled balking at a recent opportunity to work with a topnotch film director. "Why would any game designer want to do that?" Levine said. "What's the point of having two creative leads? Why would I want a film director to help me make a game, any more than they would want me to help out on their film?"

While little is known about *inSANE*, del Toro announced that his goal is "to take players to a place they have never seen before, where every single action makes them question their own senses of morality and reality." Here's hoping he gets there.

6 Shepard's Last Stand

Just started Mass Effect 2? Hurry up, Mass Effect 3's coming!



It's hard to think of a game that could steal the thunder from the sublime sci-fi saga that is *Mass Effect 2*, but Electronic Arts and BioWare may have upended their own release with the official announcement of *Mass Effect 3*. And don't worry about a protracted wait for this one: *Mass Effect 3* is launching simultaneously across platforms later this year.

While the teaser trailer offers precious few details—we see a sniper embroiled in a tense battle, while protagonist Commander Shepard views the war-torn Earth from space—we know that *Mass Effect 3* will see Shepard attempting to recruit various galactic civilizations to his/her cause and save the planet from the invading Reapers. However, we're most psyched about being able to import our finished save data from *Mass Effect 2* and carry on Shepard's adventure, with our hundreds of seemingly minor decisions carrying over to the new game and affecting its ultimate outcome.

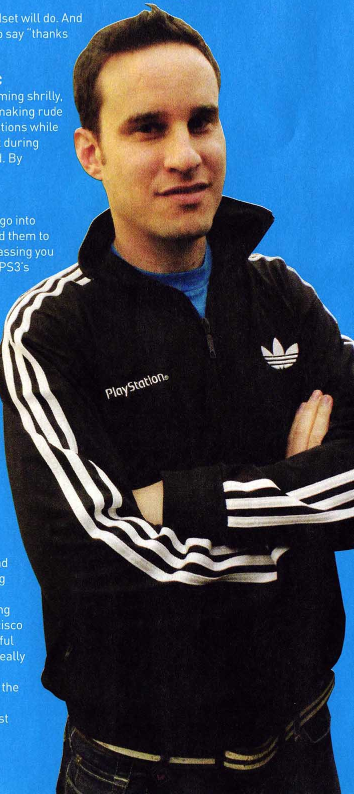
And the fact that we'll be able to play it later this year at the same time as gamers on other platforms is just the cherry on top. Now, we just need to decide which role-playing epic to tackle first: this or *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. Decisions, decisions.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

7 Oh, Behave

Be a better gamer with top tips from PlayStation's social media manager Jeff Rubenstein



Attention teamkillers, griefers, profanity spewers, racists, homophobes, and tone-deaf mutants who sing over the mic: Nobody likes you—at least, not during an online multiplayer game. We're muting you immediately, or dropping out of the game to avoid you, and the whole team will suffer as a result.

Here are my tips on how to be a better online citizen—and if you're already one of the many conscientious players out there, how to avoid them. (Remember, these are *my* opinions, and not necessarily those of Sony Computer Entertainment America.)

There are always going to be some bad apples online, but hopefully some of these tips will help you become a better member of our (virtual) society. See you online! (PSN ID: JeffPS)

Select a useful class

The team with seven snipers will lose more often than not. Nobody's ever sad to see a Medic approaching in *Killzone* and they rack up crazy XP. *Killzone's* Tactician is also very underrated and having a good one of these can be the difference between winning and losing.

Know the game type

We're not impressed with your 32–3 round when the team loses the Domination match. If all you wanna do is kill, kill, and kill some more, know that there are many, many modes for that. Ever heard of Deathmatch?

Parents: consider parenting

The first-person-shooter multiplayer arena is not the best place for your eight-year-old. Also, these tots have got ridiculous reflexes and I'm sick of getting shot up by their nimble little hands. I've got shoes older than you! Let the kiddies play *EyePet*—or, better yet, play it with them. Parenting magazines call this "quality time."

Use your mic

Anecdotally, it seems like many of you are quiet out there. A great feature of the PS3 is that it doesn't require an expensive proprietary headset. We make a great Bluetooth headset, but nearly any Bluetooth or USB headset will do. And even if you're shy, it never hurts to say "thanks for the rez!"

Don't overuse your mic

Heavy breathing, grunting, screaming shrilly, playing loud background music, making rude remarks, or having side conversations while operating your Bluetooth headset during gameplay is strongly discouraged. By everyone.

Protect yourself

If someone's ruining your match, go into "Players Met" on the XMB and add them to your Block List. If someone's harassing you via the message system, use the PS3's built-in grief reporting. This ain't *The Wire*—snitches are encouraged.

We read feedback!

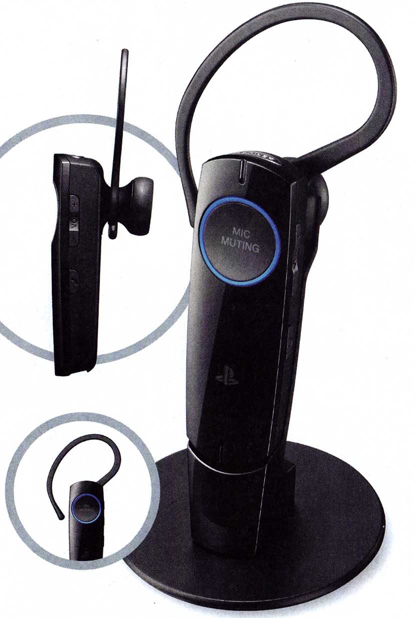
If you see it, say it! Don't assume the issue you're experiencing has already been reported. And if you're going to complain about something in a Tweet, at least include the relevant party (we're @playstation). You might be pleased to find a receptive ear on the other end.

Leave good feedback

The best parts of Play, Create, Share titles like *LittleBigPlanet* and *ModNation Racers* are the amazing community creations. One of the best rewards for creators is seeing the ratings (try out my Mod Francisco Bay track and tell me if I'm an awful designer). If you play a level you really enjoy, rate it highly and leave a thoughtful comment. Likewise, if the level was terrible, constructive criticism is helpful—you might just save a friend from wasting time.

8 Sexy 2.0

Five cool features of Sony's updated Bluetooth headset



1. Sleeker, slicker, and sexier, the 30 percent smaller headset looks like a stylish thumb drive...from the future. Its sci-fi-looking blue and red LEDs totally make it the must-have fashion accessory for *TRON* geeks.

2. The first-party headset's status indicator conveniently displays battery level, volume, and connection status right on the PS3's cross media bar.

3. In addition to an effective background-interference and echo-squashing noise cancellation feature, the device sports High Quality mode, delivering in-game voice communication clarity and superior audio quality when standard mode just isn't cutting it.

4. It can also be paired with the PS3 via a USB connection, ensuring the device and its settings are always recognized by the hardware.

5. A slew of smartphone-supporting features (compatible with a wide range of Bluetooth-enabled devices) make this more than a gaming headset.

9 The Readers' Most Wanted

Fun fact: Four of this month's top 10 picks are delayed games. Originally set for a 2010 release, *LittleBigPlanet 2* is turning out to be one of the first great games of 2011. *Final Fantasy XIV* has been put on hiatus for PS3 while everything that's wrong with the PC release is fixed—by which it is meant, *everything.* Its MMO brother, *DC Universe Online,* has finally been dated for this spring. Meanwhile, we're hearing good buzz from inside sources on *SOCOM 4.*

01 *LittleBigPlanet 2*
02 *Killzone 3*
03 *Mortal Kombat*
04 *Twisted Metal*
05 *SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs*
06 *Final Fantasy XIV*
07 *inFamous 2*
08 *Batman: Arkham City*
09 *Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds*
10 *DC Universe Online*
11 *MLB 11: The Show*
12 *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*
13 *Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One*
14 *Max Payne 3*
15 *F.E.A.R. 3*
16 *The Last Guardian*
17 *Ico and Shadow of the Colossus Collection*
18 *Dead Space 2*
19 *Duke Nukem Forever*
20 *The Lord of the Rings: War in the North*

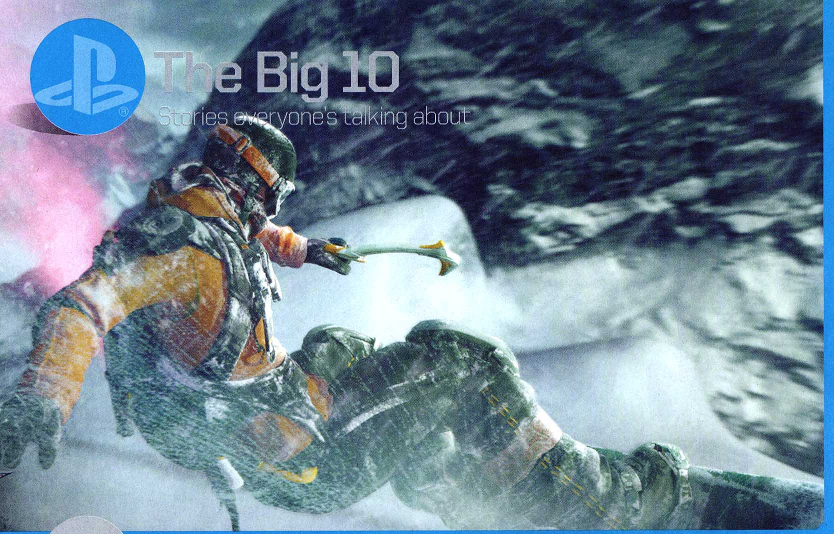
SOCOM 4

DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of OTX Research. All games are PS3 titles scheduled to release after Dec. 1, 2010. Polling period was Nov. 14, 2010, to Nov. 27, 2010.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



10 Has SSX Fallen Off a Cliff?

The staff gets heated about the series' gritty new trailer

Yes

Says the ice cold defender of fun

Scott Butterworth

Never mind the fact that this doesn't look anything like an *SSX* game. This just looks bad, period. As dark and gritty as the trailer might try to portray it, snowboarding is still just a sport. It's not like millions of lives hang in the balance, so cut the laughably overdramatic music, the idiotic action-movie dialogue, and the "I just discovered filter effects"-style visuals. It just feels desperate.

Honestly, the trailer gave me the impression that the question driving this new direction wasn't "What would be best for the *SSX* franchise?" but "How can we sell this to as many people as possible?" I could practically feel the slick-haired, suit-wearing used-car salesman patting my back just a little too hard as he reassured me that this is what all the *cool kids* are into. "Come on—don't you want to be *cool?*"

No, creepy used-car salesman in my head, I don't. I want ridiculous grind rails that completely defy the laws of physics. I want brightly colored explosions every time I launch off a ramp for 20 seconds of hang time. I want *SSX*. Sure the series is mostly about big tricks and that part probably hasn't changed, but how could EA possibly mesh this serious new style with the over-the-top stunts of *SSX* in a way that isn't laughably forced? Looks like *SSX* fans are getting snowed.

No

Says the chairman of the (snow) board

Gary Steinman

I'm the guy who often decries the seriousification of gaming. As a grand old man who's been playing games since the days of the 2600, I miss the bright colors and cartoony graphics of gaming's yesteryear. I've grown weary of all the ultrarealistic warfare, the grimy settings, the bleak post-apocalyptic worlds that've overrun modern gaming. I want bright colors and big fun. Which should mean, one might think, I want *SSX* how *SSX* used to be.

And yet I totally loved the new trailer. Yes, it's all butched up with a military-esque copter swooping in on a mountain and a snowboarder who appears to have a lot more at stake than just winning a never-ending race. But don't get fooled into thinking this is *SSX: Snow Ops.* Because, from what I saw in what is (to be fair) a little more than 30 seconds of CG, *SSX* is as lanky and as stylized and as unrealistic as ever.

I mean, c'mon! "I'm not gonna make it!" shouts the bounced-around 'boarder before plummeting off a cliff and opening his batwings to (presumably) soar to safety. *SSX* might've gotten a much-needed makeover to bring it into modern times, but it's not *Modern Warfare* on the mountainside. Instead, it's the exact kind of over-the-top descent into snowy madness I was hoping for.

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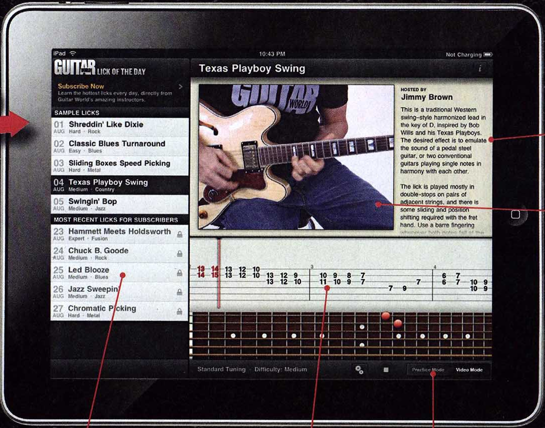

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SAMPLE LICKS

01 AUG Shreddin' Like Dixie – Hard · Rock
02 AUG Classic Blues Turnaround – Easy · Blues
03 AUG Sliding Boxes Speed Picking – Hard · Metal
04 AUG Texas Playboy Swing – Medium · Country
05 AUG Swingin' Bop – Medium · Jazz

MOST RECENT LICKS FOR SUBSCRIBERS

23 AUG Hammett Meets Holdsworth – Expert · Fusion
24 AUG Chuck B. Goode – Medium · Rock
25 AUG Led Blooze – Medium · Blues
26 AUG Jazz Sweepin' – Medium · Jazz
27 AUG Chromatic Picking – Hard · Metal

Texas Playboy Swing

HOSTED BY
Jimmy Brown

This is a traditional Western swing-style harmonized lead in the key of D, inspired by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. The desired effect is to emulate the sound of a pedal steel guitar, or two conventional guitars playing single notes in harmony with each other.

The lick is played mostly in double-stops on pairs of adjacent strings, and there is some sliding and position shifting required with the fret hand. Use a barre fingering

Standard Tuning · Difficulty: Medium

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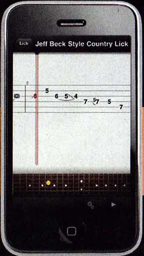

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PlayStation®
The Official Magazine

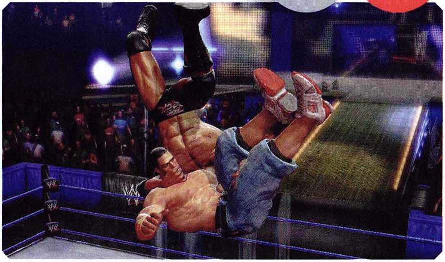
Previews

Quick Pitch

WWE
World Wrestling Entertainment's spandex circus returns to town in something decidedly different.

All-Stars?
Everyone's an all-star here. The game pits classic wrestlers against modern-day grapplers.

Pier-6 Brawling
This is no wrestling simulation, but rather an arcade-style brawler.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **THQ** Dev **THQ**

WWE All-Stars

Stars and garters and smackdowns

Sal Divita knows his fighting games.

It was his face and martial arts moves that were digitized for such *Mortal Kombat* games as *Mortal Kombat 3* and *Mortal Kombat Trilogy.* Now at THQ, Divita is a creative director and he's turned his eyes toward wrestling as done by World Wrestling Entertainment.

Let the smackdown commence.

Yet as the dearly departed wrestler Owen Hart noted, enough is enough and it is time for a change. THQ has had its say on the straightforward wrestling simulation and with *WWE All-Stars* is preparing to take an alternate look on the sport of professional wrestling. *All-Stars* fuses sports entertainment and the fighting game. It's meant to be more accessible than THQ's *WWE SmackDown vs. Raw* wrestling game series and offers something akin to *Kombat* meets the squared circle, if such a combination had its gore excised.

The wrestlers in *All-Stars* are overmuscled, almost comically so. Their moves are exaggerated; attacks cause wrestlers to fly up into the air or bounce off the mat. Superpowered holds and throws are punctuated with slow-motion effects, speed lines, and super flips and spins. The hulking John Cena will hurl his body into the air and perform a 360-degree horizontal spin before smiting a sucker with his patented Five-Knuckle Shuffle.

Wrestling's complex jumble of rules has been reduced to one: Beware the disqualification. Wrestlers can whack one another with objects—THQ doesn't refer to steel chairs as weapons—but after two hits, they risk losing the match for their bad behavior. Wrestlers can win by pins or knockout, and falls count anywhere inside or outside the ring. Submission moves are used to wear down opponents mostly, but submission wins can be gained if such a hold is performed as a finishing maneuver.

"For people who don't play videogames, we want to make the game easy to pick up, play, and have fun with," says Divita. "Then, of course, we want to add the depth into the game, where you feel you can master it—by practicing it, you can master the deep style of gameplay we're trying to put forth."

All-Stars' controls are simple, but they allow for great flexibility in terms of a wrestler's moves. Moves can be

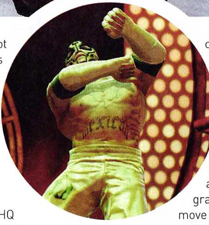
▸▸

chained together, regardless of whether they're initiated from strike attacks utilizing punches, kicks, chops, or grapples. Situational wrestling allows a wrestler to slam a foe onto the mat and then either pick him up as he rebounds off the canvas or hit him with an attack that launches him into the air. In this way, THQ has provided for both pre-set combinations and ones that can be created on the fly.

Reversals and blocks, mapped to the DualShock's L1 and R1 shoulder buttons, can be used to keep the other guy honest. The game may push a cartoonish aesthetic, but it's not offering goofy animated horses under the hood.

In motion, the wrestlers move quickly. Divita notes there's not much downtime and that wrestlers won't spend an inordinate time on the mat after getting clobbered. The zippy pace is reminiscent of most recent fighting games and although THQ wants to emphasize this is a wrestling game, its influences are obvious.

The wrestlers are grouped into categories: brawler, acrobat, big man, and grappler. Each character type will have its own individual attributes, strengths, and inclinations: Brawlers do more damage with their hits, big men move more slowly but are harder to knock down, acrobats offer aerial derring-do aplenty, and grapplers have more extensive move sets than the other fellows.



Only a cape rivals the mask for lending an air of mystery and flair...unless you're a mugger.

This adds an additional tactical element to the proceedings. Brawlers such as Cena can perform charged strikes by holding the Left-analog stick away from a foe and then holding down the Triangle button for a brief time. These attacks can be stored and used at an opportune time, perhaps as a finishing knockout blow. The quintessential grappler Bret Hart (aka The Hit Man aka The Excellence of Execution) can be used to perform a series of chain grapple moves one after another to punish a foe—and also has the ability to perform select moves that immediately transition into a pin. As a big, big man, Andre the Giant can juggle foes with his punches and

Gigantic Motives Andre the Giant

Food
Andre the Giant was a prodigious eater. Former WWE referee Tim White suggested he once ate 16 steaks and 12 lobsters in one sitting.

Drink
The Giant would routinely drink 7,000 calories' worth of alcoholic libations in one day.

Crushing Hulkamania
Andre's match with Hulk Hogan at Wrestlemania III drew a crowd of 93,000. It was considered the height of wrestling's popularity.

Acting!
The classic film *The Princess Bride* earned Andre awards for his thoughtful performance as Fezzik the giant.

Andre the Giant must outweigh Rey Mysterio by 500 pounds. But as *The Princess Bride's* Fezzik once said, "It's not my fault being the biggest and the strongest. I don't even exercise."

Triple H: Looking slightly more rippled, but considerably less moist, than usual.

physically push an attacker away when he successfully blocks a strike. Andre's diminutive compatriot Rey Mysterio can, as an acrobat, perform a host of leaping attacks and is able to clamber up onto the corner ringposts very quickly.

Here, the game offers wonderful "what if" possibilities. Pitting the game's different styles against one another seems an exercise in exploiting weaknesses and avoiding the other guy's strengths. There's also the very real intrigue to be had within the game's roster: How, exactly, would Andre and his sizable bulk fare against wrestling superstars of today? THQ won't discuss the game's modes, but has made it clear there will be some type of story-driving device within *All-Stars* and that it offers scenarios pitting old timers against the young whippersnappers.

THQ's roster for *All-Stars* has been packed with the requisite weirdoes, no-goodniks, and behemoths. The company wants to keep a tight rein on the wrestlers' identities, but we've seen the character-select screen: If they were important in the WWE, they're in the game. GREG ORLANDO

"The wrestlers in *All-Stars* are overmuscled, almost comically so."

Classic Matchup Hart to Heart

Bret "The Hit Man" Hart

Bret Hart is a classic grappler. He knows many wrestling holds and can chain his grapple moves together. When his opponent is weakened, he can apply the painful Sharpshooter hold, twisting the other guy's legs until he submits. Against the Rock, he'll need to use every trick in his arsenal.

The Rock

The Rock enjoys eating pie, strudel, and beating jabronis. He's more of a brawler and a showman than anything else, and his patented Rock Bottom elbow drop is one of wrestling's most iconic moves. Also, smelling what the Rock is cooking is a good thing, but getting in the ring with him is not.

Dev Talk

"When we do something that just doesn't feel right or look right, we get everybody squawking about it."

Sal Divita
on the dev team's wrestling passion

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **February** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Epic Games / People Can Fly**

Bulletstorm

Kick ass, take names, score big

In *Bulletstorm,* enemies aren't so much a threat as they are an opportunity for some stylish slaughter, and that's exactly why the game's cooperative Anarchy mode is so unique. While most horde modes simply pit players against endless waves of increasingly tenacious enemies and challenge them to survive as long as possible, Anarchy mode can actually be outlived by a competent enough team (though not without a few last-second revives along the way).

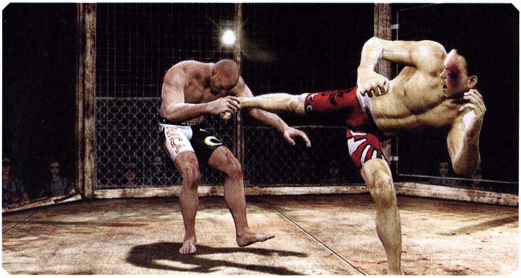
The real test lies in meeting each round's score requirement—*killing* the bad guys is easy enough, but racking up enough points in the process can be a real bullet in the ass. Fortunately, *Bulletstorm's* over-the-top mechanics are custom-designed to cater to this exaggerated style of play: With slide tackles, drop kicks, an energy lasso, and all manner of hilarious environmental hazards at their disposal, players can brutalize foes in endlessly creative ways and earn "killshot" point bonuses for specific combos.

While half the fun is discovering all of the ridiculous killshots, the real points come from team efforts. Say one player launches an enemy into the air with his lasso and his teammate then punts the hapless villain into a blazing electrical hazard, the game will award them a "Team Shocker" killshot. Time for a fist bump and/or a high five. SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

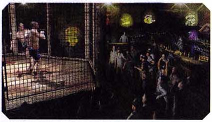
Purchase new weapons and upgrade player stats between each round. We recommend steadily increasing defensive attributes.

16 ENEMIES LEFT
7890
30 450

Tally enough points in a short enough period of time to earn a brief "Blood Symphony" rage-like bonus period.



Finally a game for those who think the UFC is just a bit too namby pamby and soft.



Turns out that seedy underground fight clubs are the *perfect* spot for a singles mixer.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **May** Pub **505 Games** Dev **Kung Fu Factory**

Supremacy MMA

Cringe und drang

According to Kung Fu Factory's CEO and creative director Ricci Rukavina, "A simulation really doesn't let you concentrate on the fun."

Rukavina is referring to fun inherent in bashing skulls and breaking bones in mostly illegal cage fighting, which *Supremacy MMA* offers as its main fare. Kung Fu Factory has great respect for other entries into the rapidly crowding mixed martial arts game genre, but it has opted to present fans with a more gory, less restrained, and certainly arcade heavy experience.

Supremacy focuses on the darker aspects of the mixed martial art sport, and the game's fictional combatants will work their way upward by initially fighting in shoddily constructed cages in warehouses and bars with the hopes of progressing on toward the big time. The game includes a story mode and fighters will gain experience as they battle their way to the top.

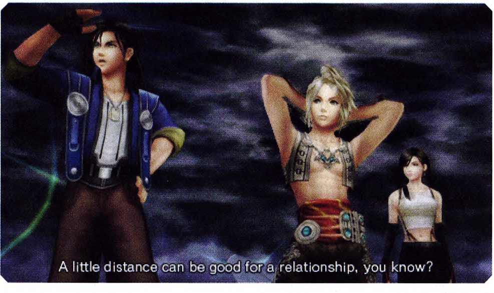
An excessively detailed blood and bruise system serves to remind us all that getting punched in the face is always an interesting proposition.

Blood smears and spills on dirty canvas floors; fighters track bloody footprints and can leave incriminating handprints everywhere. The game punctuates its gratuitous brawling with illegal moves such as the brutal jumping head stomp, offers the opportunity to break an opposing fighter's limbs, and also celebrates the good times with slow-motion knockouts. **GREG ORLANDO**

Can't wait? Play this

EA Sports MMA

Sure it's got those irritating rules, but crawl, then walk... before getting knocked down.



FIRST LOOK Format **PSP** ETA **Q1** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Square Enix**

Dissidia 012[duodecim] Final Fantasy

And all will happen again

The 12th battle between Chaos and Cosmos will occur in Square Enix's PSP-exclusive brawler *Dissidia 012[duodecim]: Final Fantasy*. Destiny's children return for the follow-up to 2009's smash-up. Joining them is Lightning *(FFXIII)*, Vaan *(FFXII)*, Laguna Loire *(FFVIII)*, Tifa Lockhart *(FFVII)*, and Kain Highwind *(FFIV)*. The neverending cycle of death and rebirth continues with additional game modes, a new Assist tactic that summons an ally for a decimating attack, and a playable Chaos storyline. **JARIK SIKAT**

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **THQ** Dev **Volition**

Red Faction Armageddon

We're on the eve of destruction

Quick pitch

Destroy
If it's standing, it can be knocked down, oftentimes in delicious ways.

Rebuild
What has been wrecked can be restored to its former glory.

Shoot
Darius Mason, who's unleashed an alien horde, needs to clean up the planet with extreme prejudice.

The sign reads no dumping, but some wit has added his own commentary with spraypaint: "This place is a [Expletive Deleted]."

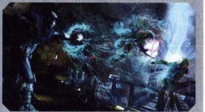
Mars is a craphole. But thanks to nanoforge technology, it can at least be a completely intact craphole. THQ's forthcoming third-person shooter *Red Faction: Armageddon* lets its protagonist Darius Mason trot around a Nanoforge to repair the wreckage of his so-called life.

Mason has unleashed an alien horde on Mars and this is not good news. To be more precise, this is the sort of news one might universally hail as *awful*—if Mason didn't have the nanoforge and a complement of exotic guns to set things right. A Magnet Gun allows the luckless Mason to attract two objects: alien to explosive barrel, huge chunk of building to huge chunk of building, enemy to other enemy, and so forth. The Nano Rifle shoots microscopic machines at a foe, causing it to disintegrate, and a Singularity Cannon creates a powerful vortex to suck in, well, everything that's even vaguely nearby.

What follows is chaotic. Rampant destruction requires frantic rebuilding and there are plenty of creeping terrors to contend with. Mason can compound the destruction as he pilots a weapons-laden mechanical suit and it's all leading up to a very wrecktastic conclusion. Thank heaven for the Nanoforge. **GREG ORLANDO**

Mr. Fixit

Tips to tidy the hellhole



1 Make way!

2 Enjoy the carnage!

3 Rebuild with repair grenades or a beam!

4 Wreck and repeat!

① While players can choose Hawke's sex and class, BioWare's intentionally limiting customization options to complement a more fleshed-out, story-driving protagonist.

② Forgoing generic fantasy in favor of a definitive art style, environments and enemies are all drawn from the murkier side of the rainbow. Not to worry, though, there's still buckets of blood and brimming bosoms to ogle.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **BioWare**

Dragon Age II

The Mass Effect effect

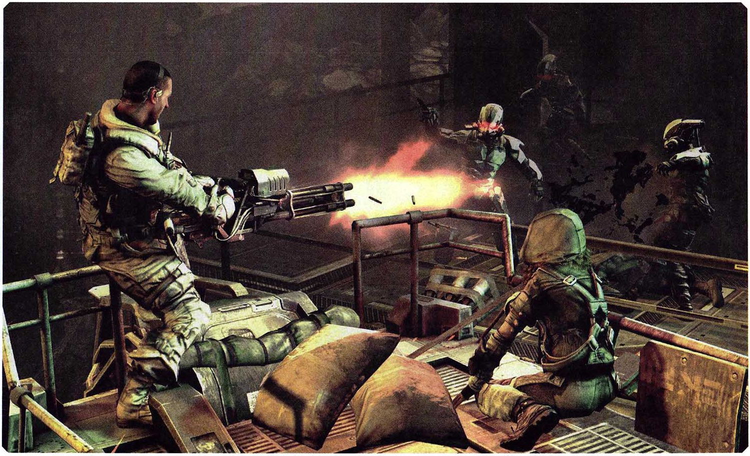
Following the success of its Commander Shepard-starring space opera, BioWare's giving *Dragon Age* a *Mass Effect* makeover. While retaining the best elements from its archdemon-slaying predecessor, *Dragon Age II* is also borrowing some refinements from its sci-fi cousin; among these are an easy-to-follow narrative focusing on epic moments over exposition-filled NPC chats, a darker art style more defining than *DA's* generic *Lord of the Rings*-like presentation, and an intuitive dialogue system that'll be familiar to those who've flirted with blue-skinned extraterrestrials behind silver-tongued Shepard.

Despite these tweaks, players won't be trading their bloodstained broadsword for a plasma blaster; *DA2* is still a sword-slashing, spell-spewing medieval fantasy romp. Its biggest evolution, in fact, is a revamped combat system that mixes button-hammering action with pause-and-play tradition. We got a taste of this behind the sharp steel and fiery spells of protagonist Hawke, who can be customized as a male or female rogue, warrior, or mage. In a castle cluttered with blade-baring goons, Hawke and his party—a sexy mage and crossbow-toting dwarf—swiftly switched between magic and melee attacks, thwarting the threat in a visceral manner that felt more hack-'n'-slash than RPG. While this more reactive action will please some, those preferring a tactical take can pause the action and battle the blight with brains and brawn.

BioWare hopes to please both camps when it welcomes brave gamers back to Ferelden this March.

MATT CABRAL

③ Following a motto of, "When you press a button, something awesome has to happen," BioWare has fixed the original's combat with feedback in every sword thrust and spell cast.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **February** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Guerrilla Games**

Killzone 3

The battle for control

The more time we spend on Helghan, the more we love the hellhole.

Our first opportunity for a deep incursion into *Killzone 3's* enemy territory reveals it's well on track to build-on the second game's breakthrough graphics and top-tier FPS gameplay. Pilotable vehicles are a new feature addition to the series; sequences featuring rides in the Exoskeleton from *Killzone 2* and the all-new jet pack offer a nice change of pace while adding new dimensions to the game's intense, unrelenting fire fights.

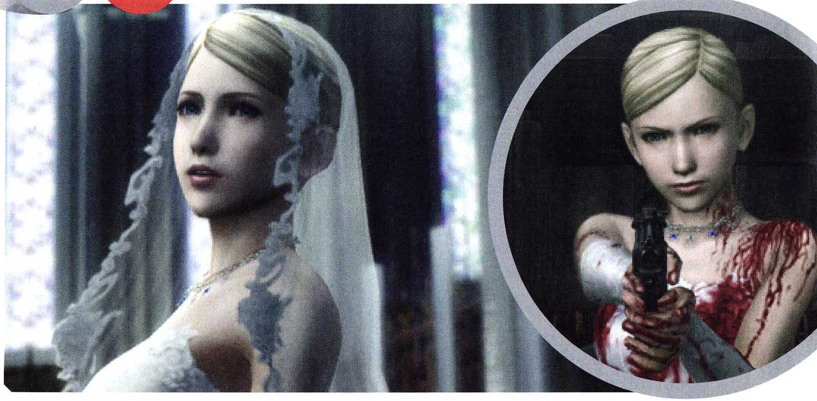
But it's the Move compatibility that could be *Killzone 3's* most revolutionary element. The aiming is so precise and intuitive that we frequently found we no longer needed to zoom in while firing, and melee attacks and reloading is almost instinctual, requiring just a poke of the wand or a twist of the wrist. The big question is what effect Move control has on the gameplay balance and overall difficulty (segments that gave us fits with the DualShock controller seemed tamed with the Move) and Guerrilla Games has already indicated that it may need to segregate online multiplayer matches based on the players' control scheme selection.

We've seen smatterings of Move's potential in these days of its infancy, but *Killzone 3* is the first hardcore-oriented implementation that has us seriously contemplating whether motion control should become our interface of choice.

ROGER BURCHILL

▲ **Capture troops seem to prefer killing to taking custody—which just makes it more satisfying when we jam our thumbs into their eye sockets.**

▲ **Alluring newcomer Jammer joins the ISA team. Time to update our match.com relationship-search parameters with the term: badass hottie.**



Aya is one bride we don't recommend stranding at the altar.

HANDS-ON Format **PSP** ETA **Q1** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Square Enix**

The 3rd Birthday

A very twisted Christmas

While crowds assemble at Rockefeller Center's sparkling tree, shoppers jam the sidewalks of Times Square. For New Yorkers it wouldn't be the holidays without these sights. For *The 3rd Birthday's* Aya Brea, however, it wouldn't be Christmas without parasites attacking the human race.

Published in 1998, Square Enix's RPG *Parasite Eve* pitted rookie cop Aya Brea against legions of mutated mitochondria. Two years later, Aya saved the world again in the more action-driven *Parasite Eve II.* But while that spelled the end for the malevolent organisms, according to *Birthday's* director Hajime Tabata *(Crisis Core: FFVII)*, Aya's tale is far from over.

Christmas Eve 2012 ushers in a sudden attack on the Big Apple bringing mankind to its knees. The perpetrators, a new hyper-evolved strain designated the Twisted, erect a skyscraping hive downtown.

Within a year humanity is teetering on the brink. The White House green lights the activation of the classified Overdive system, a massive device capable of sending someone back in time by "leaping" their consciousness into other beings. But to make the trip, the traveler must have no memories.

Aya—now recruited into the ranks of CTI, the government agency responsible for the Overdive system—can't recall the details of her own life, but her tactical training remains intact making her the prime candidate.

Her mission is simple: Go back in time, alter mankind's fate.

Quantum Leap

The 3rd Birthday is modern third-person survival horror at its core, but Aya's ability to Overdive into other bodies adds a novel dimension. She can evade, clear impedances, and climb to elevated positions, but if there are soldiers within eyeshot Aya can select a new host, leap, and gain the full tactical advantages of that soldier's weapons, field position, health, and on occasion, skills. Should the avatar come close to death, Aya can rapidly select and Overdive into a new host.

Although it's Aya's consciousness that's leaping from body to body, she's never actually on the battlefield even though Aya's persona is the one we see on screen. Tabata and the development team conceived this approach deliberately—not because Aya looks hot in skinny jeans, but to sustain the relationship between Aya and players.

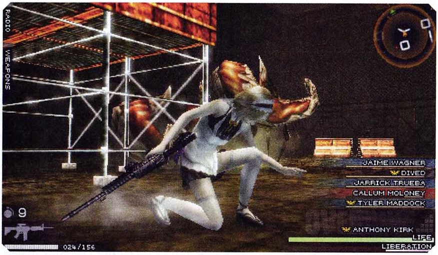
The Kill Box

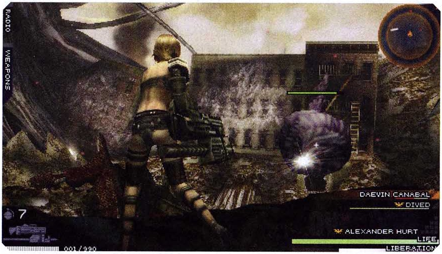
With the third-person view, targeting and selection in the game's three-dimensional space is effortless. Auto-targeting instantly orients Aya toward the closest threat to kill or she can opt to select the next mark. In a patrol scenario, locking-on for a sustained period initiates a "linkage":

Aya's Men

Kyle Madigan
Madigan is a former U.S. government agent investigating neo-mitochondrial activity in *Parasite Eve II.* Though once seen in New York with Aya, his current whereabouts remain unknown.

Kunihiko Maeda
A leading mitochondria researcher from the first *Parasite Eve*, Maeda returns to Manhattan after the Twisted's onslaught.


RADIO
WEAPONS
JAIME WAGNER
DIVED
JARRICK TRUEBA
CALLUM MOLONEY
TYLER MADDOCK
9
ANTHONY KIRK
LIFE
024/156
LIBERATION


RADIO
WEAPONS
DAEVIN CANABAL
DIVED
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ALEXANDER HURT
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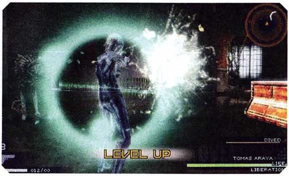
LIBERATION


LEVEL UP
DIVED
TOMAS ARAYA
LIFE
LIBERATION
012/00

The Overdive ability allows Aya to assume control of other characters' equipment and capabilities.

a coordinating measure where the entire unit redirects fire onto the selected threat. Once an enemy is stunned, Aya can launch an Overdive Kill by leaping into the target and destroying the Twisted from within.

Aya primarily levels up through combat experience. Infusing her DNA with Over Energy chips collected in battle can further enhance combat abilities. Aya also has a Liberation gauge that's filled by attacking; once unleashed, Liberation gives Aya a speed burst that allows her to evade enemy barrages and return fire with devastating results.

Timeline Parasitic Evolution

Parasite Eve
(1995)
Japanese pharmacologist Hideaki Sena's *Parasite Eve* novel published

Parasite Eve
(1997)
The novel is successfully adapted to a feature film

Parasite Eve
(1998)
Hironobu Sakaguchi creates *Parasite Eve* for PlayStation

Parasite Eve II
(2000)
Parasite Eve II is released

The 3rd Birthday
(2011)
Square Enix readies *The 3rd Birthday* for PSP

1995 TIMELINE 2011

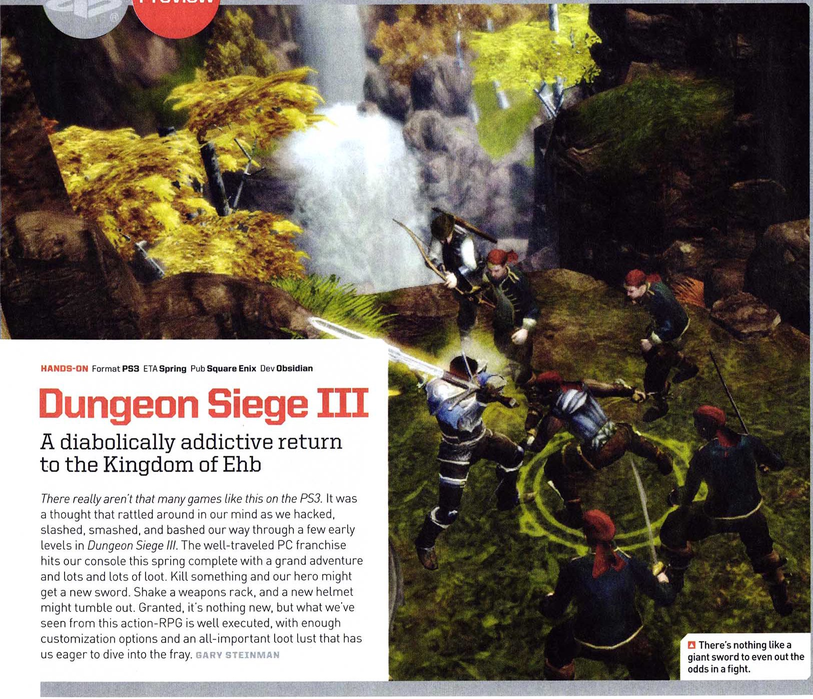
Second Chances

The original *Parasite Eve* also took place during Christmas Eve in New York, but let's not call this a reboot. Aya suffers from amnesia, which is the direct result of the first two games, explains Tabata—though he does hint that Aya's mission could lead to her recovery. Kyle Madigan, Kunihiko Maeda, and other characters from the previous games still exist. The rest of world is also aware of past events, which Tabata and team are weaving into the fabric of this new story.

The theme of second chances, or in this case third and fourth chances, resonates throughout *The 3rd Birthday* whether it's returning to life from the verge of death or reclaiming the past. Consider this chance a welcome rebirth when the game hits PSP in early 2011. JARIK SIKAT

Hostage Crisis
The U.S. Link

Game director Hajime Tabata cites American dramas such as *Lost* and *24* as inspirations, briefly referring to Aya as actually "being taken hostage" inside Counter Twisted Investigations' headquarters. Could it be that the CTI organization has some twists of its own?



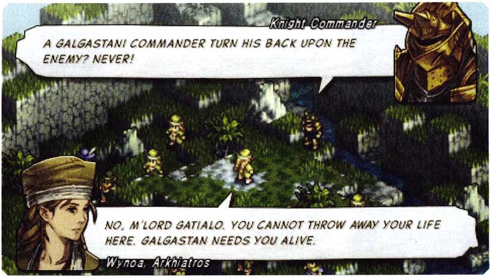
▲ There's nothing like a giant sword to even out the odds in a fight.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Spring** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Obsidian**

Dungeon Siege III

A diabolically addictive return to the Kingdom of Ehb

There really aren't that many games like this on the PS3. It was a thought that rattled around in our mind as we hacked, slashed, smashed, and bashed our way through a few early levels in *Dungeon Siege III*. The well-traveled PC franchise hits our console this spring complete with a grand adventure and lots and lots of loot. Kill something and our hero might get a new sword. Shake a weapons rack, and a new helmet might tumble out. Granted, it's nothing new, but what we've seen from this action-RPG is well executed, with enough customization options and an all-important loot lust that has us eager to dive into the fray. **GARY STEINMAN**



Knight Commander

A GALGASTANI COMMANDER TURN HIS BACK UPON THE ENEMY? NEVER!

NO, M'LORD GATIALO. YOU CANNOT THROW AWAY YOUR LIFE HERE. GALGASTAN NEEDS YOU ALIVE.

Wynoa, Arkhiatros

HANDS-ON Format **PSP** ETA **February** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Square Enix**

Tactics Ogre

Let Us Cling Together

The same moon shines

An afternoon with the PSP-exclusive remake of *Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together* reveals a game that plays much like the original PlayStation classic released nearly two decades ago. Though that's not to say Square Enix is resting on its laurels.

One of the most significant enhancements to the remake enables two players to battle each other via ad-hoc wireless. While this feature wasn't in the current build, the revamped interface, added skills,

One of Gretchen's cooler spells.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Early 2011** Pub **Namco Bandai** Dev **Game Republic**

Knights Contract

Which witch is witch?

Not many games star unkillable heroes who beg for the release of death. Even fewer are set during medieval times, just as the bubonic plague is devastating the world. In the quasi-historical beat-'em-up *Knights Contract,* there's all that—plus witches.

Heinrich is an axe-wielding badass who can't die. He faces off against hordes of the undead. To clarify: he's not invulnerable, as we saw him hacked up, disemboweled, and torn limb from limb during our playtest. But his curse of immortality allows him to quickly stitch himself back together. The demons Heinrich smashes to bloody bits? Not so lucky.

So if we can't die, where's the challenge? That's where Heinrich's witch pal Gretchen comes in. She wants his help to stop all the awful crones out there (like an evil flying harpy with an exposed rib cage) and in return Gretchen will finally let him rest in peace. However, Gretchen *can* die, and it's game over if that occurs.

As Heinrich slices up monsters, Gretchen tries not to get hit. The trade off for this escort job: He can command her to cast some pretty nifty spells on the fly. Spikes and other violent delights pop out of the ground to lay waste to the beasts. Should Gretchen need healing or Heinrich require some stitch work, the immortal one can pick up his fragile ally and run away while simultaneously healing. It's a sweet gesture, one that speaks of a budding relationship. We'll wait to see how this duo develops, but nothing builds bonds like killing monsters together. HENRY GILBERT

Can't Wait? Play these

Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom
(PS3, 2010)
The charming duo revels in old-school gaminess.

Enslaved: Odyssey to the West
(PS3, 2010)
Nothing says love like power-boosting slave collars.

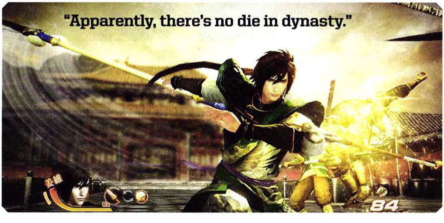
and the ability to upgrade our entire party (rather than individual members) were all noteworthy. The new Chariot Tarot and World Tarot systems, which let us revisit critical battles or story points to alter their destiny, were intriguing as well.

Hiroshi Minagawa (one of the original game's illustrators), character designer Akihiko Yoshida *(Final Fantasy XII),* and series newcomer Masao Tsubasa *(Metal Gear Acid)* have created stunning new visuals—from bewitching tarot card faces and 3D maps to complete character makeovers.

The story remains unchanged but includes more narrative details, subplots, and playable characters cut from the original release. With a re-arranged score from Hitoshi Sakimoto *(Valkyria Chronicles)* and Masaharu Iwata *(Final Fantasy XII),* there's hope the same moon will shine even brighter. JARIK SIKAT

One Trick Pony

Dynasty Warriors VII (Tecmo KOEI)



"Apparently, there's no die in dynasty."

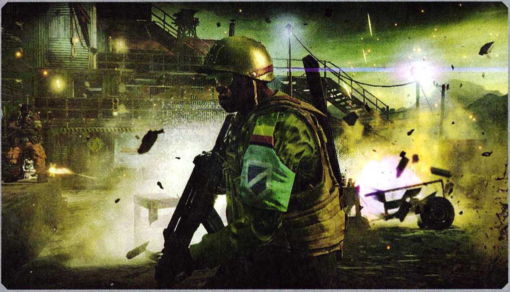
The latest on...

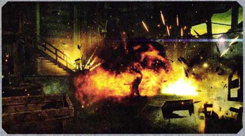
New shots, new games, new info

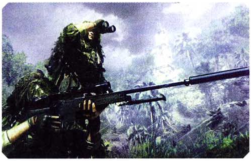
Bodycount

Format **PS3** ETA **Summer** Pub **Codemasters**
Dev **Codemasters Studios Guildford**

Bodycount has always been advertised as "gun porn"—a game that's devoted to capturing the true sound and feel of modern combat firearms and giving players plenty of bad guys to use them on. But in our early hands-on time, what really stood out were the game's destructible environments. Like the structures in *Red Faction: Guerrilla*, most walls can literally be ripped to shreds, creating new lines of sight and even new paths through each level. The shooting and aiming felt fine, but we can't wait to start tearing through buildings with the truly high-caliber weapons we hope to acquire later in the game.



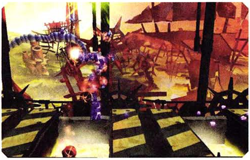




Sniper: Ghost Warrior

Format **PS3** ETA **February** Pub **City Interactive**
Dev **City Interactive**

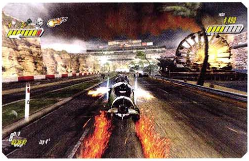
Imagine an entire game that plays like Price's flashback mission in the original *Modern Warfare*. That's essentially what *Sniper* has to offer, only with on-screen wind, distance, and heart-rate indicators—all of which affect shot accuracy. Stay low and don't miss.



Swarm

Format **PSN** ETA **Q1** Pub **Ignition Entertainment**
Dev **Hothead Games**

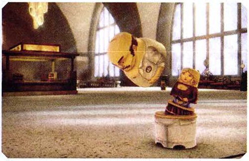
Why settle for a single mascot when you can have 50? The Swarmites cooperate to acquire rewards and reach seemingly inaccessible areas. Guiding the self-sacrificing brood through trap-filled levels should make for a fresh take on the traditional platform game formula.



Jimmie Johnson's Anything with an Engine

Format **PSN** ETA **TBD 2011** Pub **Autumn Games**
Dev **Isopod Labs**

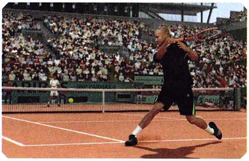
Turns out that NASCAR champ Jimmie Johnson is a gamer and a *Mario Kart* fan, but driving cartoon karts impacts his track cred. So he's creating his own racer featuring rides like souped-up lawn mowers and powered-up bomb casings.



Stacking

Format **PSN** ETA **Early 2011** Pub **THQ** Dev **Double Fine**

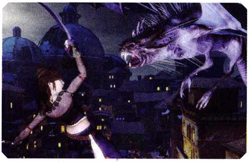
Just when we thought there's no possible way to do something new in the puzzle genre, along comes the latest from Tim Schafer's Double Fine studio. Using Russian stacking dolls as both the characters and gameplay mechanic, *Stacking* already looks quirky and delightful.



Top Spin 4

Format **PS3** ETA **February** Pub **2K Sports** Dev **2K Czech**

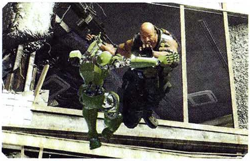
No, that's not a photo of Andre Agassi. This is, we're told, what to expect from the game's new TV broadcast-style presentation. It's gorgeous, sure, but the real ace comes in the form of more than 4,000 animations aimed to capture every player's signature moves.



Venetica

Format **PS3** ETA **January** Pub **Atari** Dev **Deck 13**

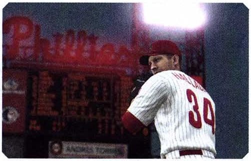
Hitting stores alongside this issue, *Venetica* is a rollicking RPG that offers a vibrant take on 16th century Venice. As the lovely heroine Scarlett, players will wander through the streets and canals of Italy's charming metropolis to expunge the city of a deadly necromancer.



Binary Domain

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **Sega** Dev **Sega**

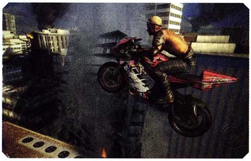
Tokyo, 2080. Mankind is fighting for survival against a robotic invasion. But it's not just gunplay going on. Humanity is also struggling to retain its, well, *humanity*, while the robots are become more human. It's all part of the new shooter from *Yakuza* creator Toshihiro Nagoshi.



Major League Baseball 2K11

Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **2K Sports** Dev **2K Sports**

It seems realism is the name of the game when it comes to 2K Sports. This hardball sim not only boasts completely rebuilt player models but also the option to have players' performances influenced by their real-world counterparts via the MLB Today updates.



MotorStorm: Apocalypse

Format **PS3** ETA **Spring** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Evolution Studios**

Who knew an earthquake could be so much fun? For the twisted makers of *MotorStorm*, it's the perfect opportunity to stage an open-class competition with everything from superbikes to muscle cars racing against a backdrop of crumbling buildings, bridges, and tunnels.

Gut Reaction

What's strong and what's wrong

▲Prototype 2
The biggest competition to *inFamous 2's* heroic dominance is coming in 2012.

▲Souls Still Burn
The *Demon's Souls*, that is. The servers for this deviously hardcore gem will now stay live for another year.

▲11.11.11
The date we'll be locked away playing *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. We might not emerge until 12.12.12.

PS3
PlayStation Network
The Elder Scrolls V
SKYRIM
RP
Bethesda

▼Funky Casting
We're still miffed about the choice of Mark Wahlberg to play Nathan Drake in the upcoming *Uncharted* film.

▼Roger's Facial Fears
"I might suck at *L.A. Noire* because I can't read people correctly. Especially women."

▼inSANE Hubris
Really, Guillermo? Announcing a trilogy before you've even proven yourself with one game?!

Another nameless victim, another typical Saturday night in Los Angeles. Behind the bright lights and beyond the sparkly thoroughfares, one detective toils away on a mission to cleanse this rotten town, to expunge the fetid stink of decay and corruption. He is Detective Cole Phelps, and this is...

WORLD EXCLUSIVE SCREENS
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

By Evan Shamoon

L.A. Noire is a detective story, but it's not just any detective story. This might be the most ambitious adventure game ever produced. For decades, others have tried to blend cinema and videogames, but none has yet achieved the unholy union at the level that *L.A. Noire* aims to deliver. Because despite some triumphs, the power of the narrative videogame has always been compromised by the technology behind it. In cinema, it's always been possible to capture the emotional complexity of an actor's performance with even the even the lowliest camera—the actor's performance speaks for itself. With videogames, that's not the case, as the characters' emotional sophistication and sincerity has long been filtered through primitive captures and animations. Rockstar is aiming to change that with *L.A. Noire.*

The game is rooted in ideas and narratives that have been explored for nearly a century.

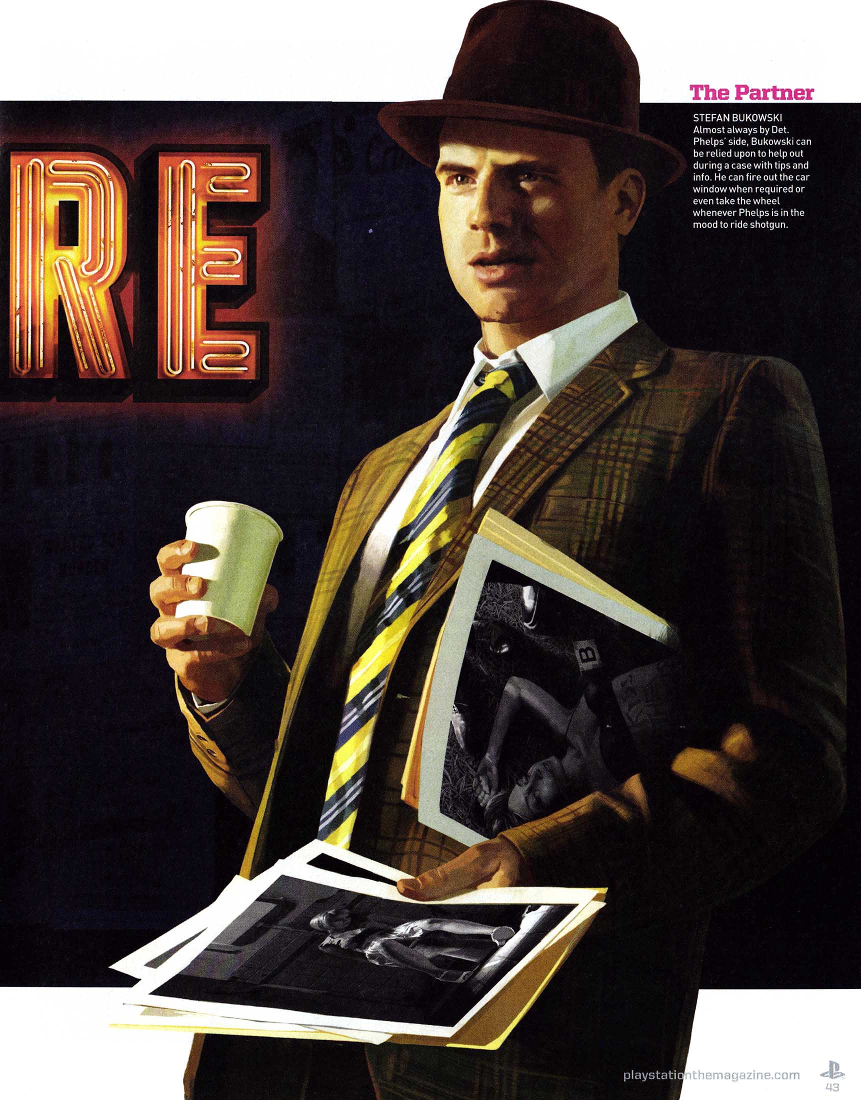
The game is the brainchild of Brendan McNamara's Team Bondi and began development solely under the studio's own roof. When Rockstar took over the publishing reigns from SCEA, however, the project became a significantly larger proposition. It's now being worked on by "several" international Rockstar studios in preparation for its March 2011 release.

What makes the game so ambitious is how it draws from a faded genre of a bygone era—the PC-centric point-and-click adventure. Like the LucasArts and Sierra titles of the '80s and '90s, the emphasis is clearly placed on the story and how it's told. This time, however, rather than mere onscreen text and animated sprites, it's infused by the sophistication and emotional girth of strong actors: What matters here is not only *what* they say but *how* they say it, and how they look when doing so. Essentially, if you're not on board for what's happening between the actors on screen in *L.A. Noire,* well, you're kinda missing the point.

Pulp Fiction

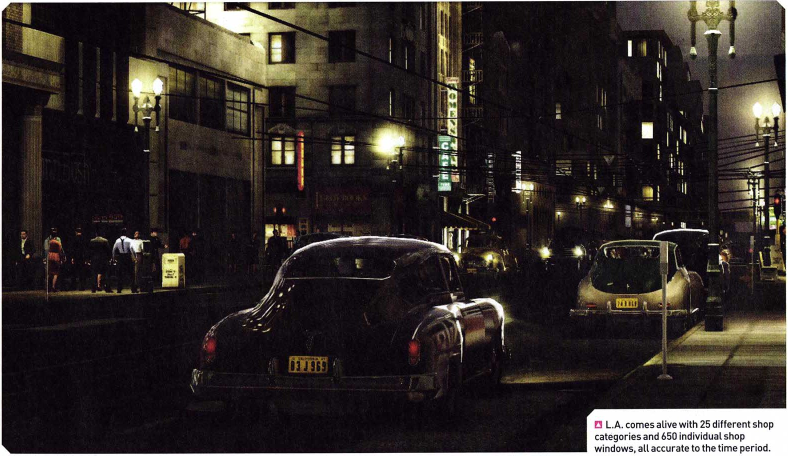
While the aforementioned adventure games serve as inspiration, *L.A. Noire* also harkens back quite a bit further—to the police procedural, both in print and on screen. "Originally, [the inspiration] was literature," says director Brendan McNamara. "I love [James] Ellroy's L.A. Quartet and even as a kid, Chandler and Hammett. I love that kind of stuff." Indeed, it was this material that inspired the movies—film noir like *Double Indemnity, The Big Sleep,* and *The Public Enemy*—that in turn inspired the game. This was a very conscious choice. Essentially, in order to ease players into a new type of videogame experience, the game is rooted in ideas and narratives that have been explored for nearly a century and for which the rules are already well understood.

At the center of *L.A. Noire* is protagonist and LAPD detective Cole Phelps—played by the actor Aaron Staton, best known for his role as account executive Ken Cosgrove in *Mad Men.* Throughout the experience the player is assigned cases to investigate, some of which tie together in surprising ways. Each and every one of these cases requires research and procedure: surveying the crime scene, tracking down witnesses, making connections, and—significantly—speaking to those who may have usable information. Interrogations are both the game's cinematic expression as well as a crucial part of its gameplay. Every interrogation is infused with decision points—beats in conversation where the player will choose to express faith, doubt, or sheer mistrust in what the interrogated party is saying, as communicated by their words, intonation, physical behavior, and facial expressions. And this is where the technology becomes essential...



The Partner

STEFAN BUKOWSKI
Almost always by Det. Phelps' side, Bukowski can be relied upon to help out during a case with tips and info. He can fire out the car window when required or even take the wheel whenever Phelps is in the mood to ride shotgun.



L.A. comes alive with 25 different shop categories and 650 individual shop windows, all accurate to the time period.

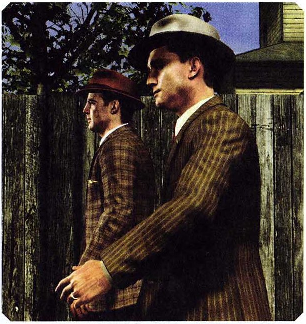
Aaron Stanton is recording today in DepthAnalysis' unassuming office suite in Culver City, Calif. It's his 49th day of shooting using the company's proprietary capture technology called MotionScan. During a short break, we're brought inside the stark white shooting room: Surrounding the actor's chair are 32 cameras, rigged 360 degrees around, and enough lights to illuminate a city block. Next door is a humming server pool, where all of the data taken from the cameras is being processed and stored. This is, at the moment, the only MotionScan production facility in the world.

The obvious result of this technology is that *L.A. Noire* allows players to more fully appreciate an actor's performance than any game we've seen to date. By capturing an incredibly high amount of detail and, crucially, compressing it down to a size that a game engine can handle in real time, MotionScan is letting the actors become their in-game characters with impressive results. *L.A. Noire* is MotionScan's public debut, and interestingly, is fully owned by DepthAnalysis, which in turn is game director McNamara's own company. He needed a better tool for telling the kinds of stories he wanted to tell, so he built it himself.

What's perhaps most interesting is how much a part of the experience the acting actually becomes. The moment-to-moment gameplay of *L.A. Noire* is a combination of walking around inspecting areas and casing joints, examining items, and driving—all punctuated by violence in the form of fistfights, shootouts, and car chases. Questioning other characters takes place frequently through a series of intercut profiles and close-ups; without over-the-top performances and giveaway dialogue, judging the dynamic between onscreen characters becomes key to determining who's lying and who's telling the truth. It is, quite simply, compelling cinema tightly woven into a game narrative. While the advanced facial capture doesn't integrate into the "undirected" gameplay (the director takes control of the framing and composition during significant dialogue), it's hardly perceptible when the

> *MotionScan is letting the actors become their in-game characters with impressive results.*

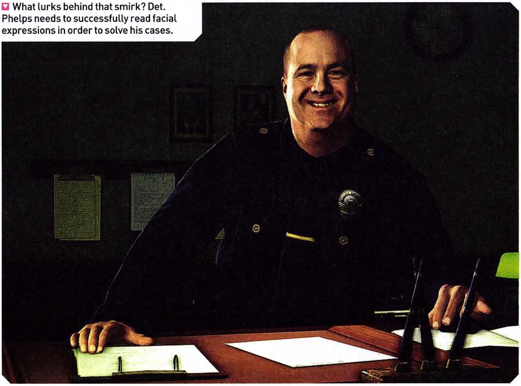
EAR
ROYAL FOR STYLE
CUT



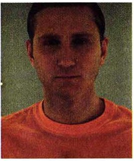
camera pulls out for the third-person action.

"The beauty of the technology is that what you see from the actor is definitely what you get, and there's no level of interpretation between that. It just goes straight from that into the game," says McNamara about the MotionScan process. What's simply fascinating is how much more compelling the scenes here feel. Even entering midway through the story arc (our demos take place at different points in the game's timeline), the barrier to emotional entry is significantly lower than we're used to—less like watching what's traditionally been an in-game cutscene and more like watching well-produced television or film. No, they don't look anywhere near 100 percent realistic; bodies are still clearly made of polygons and texture maps are still plainly visible. But watching the subtle widening and squinting of eyes, pursing of lips, and wrinkling of brows on characters' faces brings them to life in a very real way and provides the sort of palette that actors can fill with layers of meaning, moral ambiguity, and misdirection. This is, after all, interactive film noir.

What lurks behind that smirk? Det. Phelps needs to successfully read facial expressions in order to solve his cases.

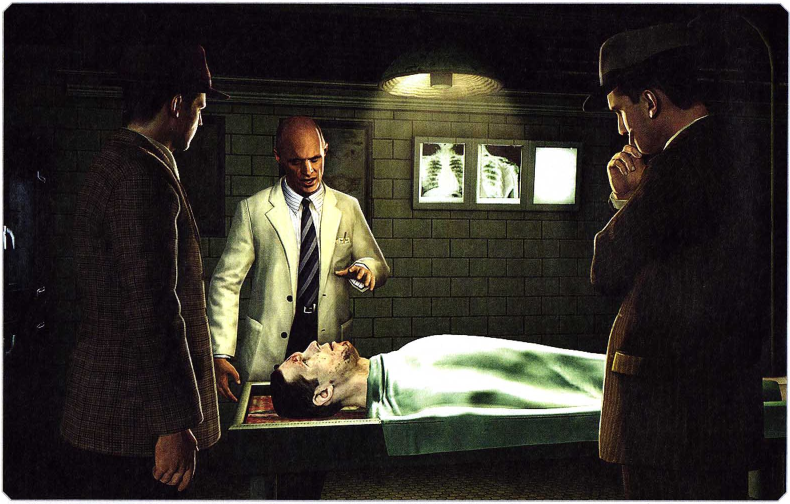


Uncanny Likeness

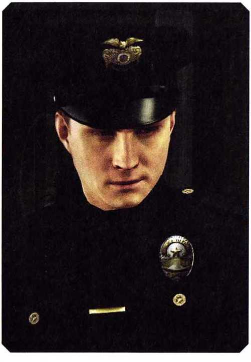


Essentially, MotionScan technology lets Rockstar and Team Bondi combine their actors' physical and expressive acting in a more evolved, more nuanced way than ever before. The motion capture process comes first, and is performed by the cast itself rather than body doubles. "We just treated mocap like 'theater in the round'," says McNamara. "You don't know where the audience is, you don't know where the camera is. And because of that, we got these ensemble performances and relationships between the characters."

Once the mocap is locked, next comes the facial capture, which takes place with each actor in isolation from the rest of the cast and over the course of several months. It's a protracted process, certainly, and one that works because it occurs toward the end of the production. "By the time they come to this [point]—which is totally disembodied—they would now understand their character," says McNamara. The relevant heads and bodies are then joined together in post production, and the artists go to work.



Things don't always end so neatly. The team is working hard to ensure there's a finely tuned balance between investigation and intense action.

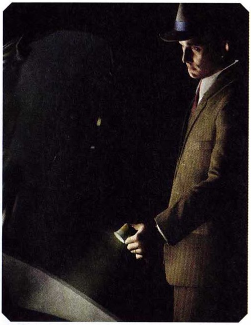


In an exclusive look at a case entitled "Consul's Car," we ride shotgun as Phelps and his partner, Stefan Bukowsky, are sent to investigate an abandoned vehicle. Some preliminary inspection reveals that the car is owned by the Argentinean embassy; missing are tires, plates, and an Argentinean flag. A combination wrench has been left at the scene with "Property of Dewey Bros." etched into the steel, which we take. We find a witness at the scene, a grizzled fellow by the name of Oswald Jacobs whose property the car was found on. We're able to suss out that the car was stripped by a group of Mexicans (speaking "Mexican," as Jacobs quaintly informs us). Jacobs also provides the notebook he found in the glove compartment, belonging to one Juan Francisco Valdez; it contains pages of male names with brief physical descriptions—ranging from body types to what kind of candy they prefer—along with contact information for a William Dewey.

Using this knowledge, we're able to track down Valdez and lay into him during an interrogation. Because we've got dirt on him, we're comfortable calling him on his bluffs and steer the conversation as we wish; without having found the required evidence, the process would certainly have required more trial and error and perhaps even another visit to the crime scene. We learn about Valdez' relationship with Dewey (illegal kickbacks on expensive vehicles) and his inappropriate relations with underage boys. To get us off his back, he suggests that the car thief may be a mechanic at Dewey's dealership by the name of Gabriel.

Loose Ends

We end at Dewey's dealership, working from notes in our indispensible notebook to figure out that the wrench was indeed one clearly missing from Gabriel's workspace. Dewey, a lumpy, fast-talking used-car salesman of a human if there ever was one, finally gives up Gabriel's address. We hop into our car and

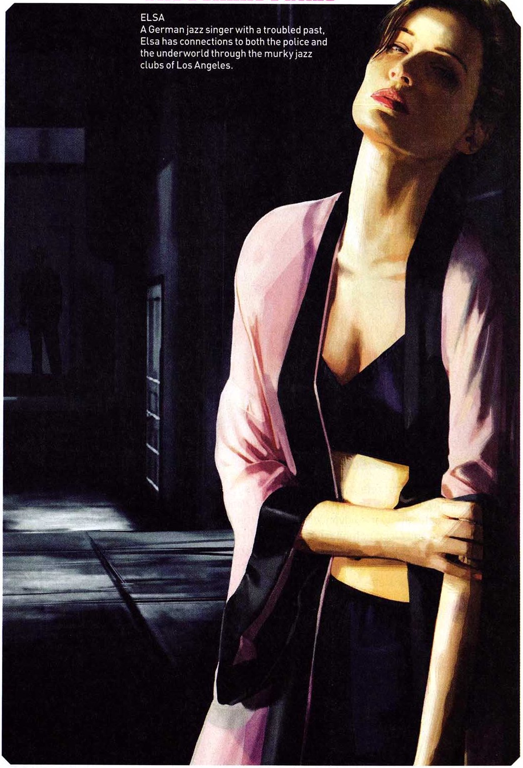


Though the game focuses on studious investigation, the careful quest for clues is broken up with car chases, intense shootouts, and furious fisticuffs.

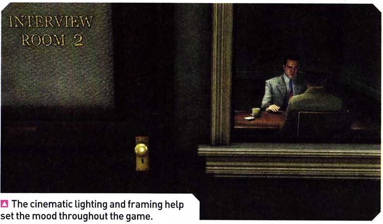
speed to his apartment, where his distressed wife eventually tips us off that her husband is involved in illegal street races down by the Los Angeles River; what follows is an intense, high-speed car chase through the ravine that ends with our suspect in cuffs.

But things don't always end so neatly. The final stretch of another mission we're shown is the most action-packed of our demonstration. After chasing a perp up the girders of an enormous old movie set (in which the player aims and runs, while the game handles the actual jumps across beams and leaps up stairs), we finally corner the suspect at the top of the set, some five stories up. Some goons out to get him have arrived by this point and he surrenders, begging us to protect him against his oncoming assailants. Which we do, pulling out our trusty sidearm and taking cover, slowly blasting our way through the enemies using *Red Dead Redemption*-style aim mechanics. It's decidedly more traditional action gameplay and the team is working hard to make sure there's a finely tuned balance between button-banging action and cerebral exposition.

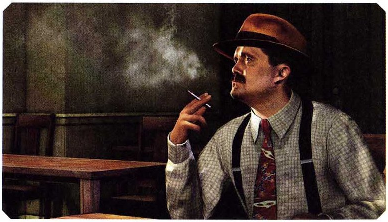
The Femme Fatale



ELSA
A German jazz singer with a troubled past, Elsa has connections to both the police and the underworld through the murky jazz clubs of Los Angeles.



The cinematic lighting and framing help set the mood throughout the game.



The closest point of reference for *L.A. Noire* may seem like *Heavy Rain* with its similar detective work, advances towards realism, and strong emphasis on story and character. But in fact, one might argue that *Heavy Rain* succeeded *despite* its acting, where Rockstar's title looks to succeed in large part because of it. And while *Heavy Rain* takes a more "casual" approach to gaming—relying on easily understood quick-time events and simplified controls—*L.A. Noire's* roots are in more traditional games (perhaps most perceptibly *Grand Theft Auto IV*). Rockstar isn't talking yet about just how the whole experience will tie together, but we're told that it borrows liberally from episodic television serials in terms of overall structure.

> "From day one we knew it was going to be a low body count game, and that didn't scare us off."

Trolley-Dogs
PUSH
STOW IT
Don't
THROW IT

Even the colors were laboriously recreated to reflect post-WWII L.A.

And while *L.A. Noire* may have its roots in nearly a hundred years worth of film and literature, there's little precedent for 1940s-era film noir in videogames. Then again, the Western certainly wasn't a particularly obvious thematic choice either and *Red Dead Redemption* proved to be one of 2010's most critically and commercially successful titles. "We're working together on this and from day one we knew it was going to be a low body count game, and that didn't scare us off—just in the same way publishing a table tennis game isn't going to scare us off," says Jeronimo Barrera, Rockstar's VP of product development. "We thought Brendan and Team Bondi's vision was something fresh and new and that's what we want to do. We want to push this medium forward—there's so much that hasn't been explored and we're just doing what we think is going to take us to the next level."

As for McNamara, as he heads into the final phase of directing his largest production to date? "I'm as excited as I ever could be. People ask if I'm gonna take a year off at the end of this one—and my family would probably like me to—but I've still got stories to tell. And I'd like to tell those through videogames. We're at this point where these things converge and something new comes out the other side of it. I really feel *[L.A. Noire]* is that kind of point."

Virtual Noire

The science and art of building the city of angels

While Rockstar certainly has plenty of experience in building virtual cities (as does Team Bondi, in its former life as Team SOHO—creator of the London-based *Getaway* series), the process of recreating a sprawling 1940s Los Angeles was no easy feat. In part, of course, because it no longer exists: "The premise was that we wanted to recreate Los Angeles before it became 'L.A.'—how it really was in the boom of [the city]," says Team Bondi production designer Simon Wood. "We wanted to have very tight, concise research that we could fall back on." Here's how Wood and his team pulled it off.

EXTRA
Los Angeles Examiner
ROOSEVELT DIES
F. D. R. PASSES IN SLUMBER AT WARM SPRINGS

Research
The team contacted various universities as well as the renowned Huntington Library, where they acquired comprehensive hand-drawn WPA [Works Progress Administration] maps, which they stitched together to create the basis for their Los Angeles. UCLA provided them with nearly every single photograph used on the front page of the *Los Angeles Herald* and *Examiner* from 1939 to the early 1950s, and they trolled through the thousands of issues of all the local papers looking for interesting stories to draw from.

Reading
"I bought a lot of original magazines on eBay, *House and Garden*, and Sears catalogs," says Wood, recalling his wife's rather puzzled initial response to seeing the charges on their credit card bill. What they uncovered was a surprising amount of parity. Rather than a Bravia flatscreen on the wall being the focal point of living rooms, for instance, it was just a floor-standing radio or record player. Instead of videogames, friends and families played board games together, which slightly altered the layout of furniture.

Building
In addition to its many miles of urban outdoor sprawl, the game includes some 140 multi-room interior locations. Wood describes the central police station as an example, which includes all of the following: A detective room, a briefing room, two captain's offices, the secretary's typing pool, two interrogation rooms, the lineup room, the jail cell—along with a locker room and technical services office downstairs. And that's just one building. "The detectives didn't even write their own memos, they just gave them to the secretaries in the typing pool; so we have these wonderful women with their big hair and their big pointy bras typing away. They're constantly there and the player can see that as he walks around the police station," says Wood.

Lighting
As interactive film noir, lighting was obviously of utmost importance to establishing mood. And from the outset, Roman Polanski's 1974 film *Chinatown* served as a formative inspiration for the Los Angeles that the team wanted to capture—from the way it was shot to the way it captured the distinctive blue haze and Technicolor sunsets. Both were readily apparent (and impressive) in our rides around the city. And while interior lighting was essential to convey mood, the team didn't just want to fake it: "We always try to get blinds or architectural beams or reveals—something so we can always get a shadow on somebody," says Wood.

Color
Bringing color to an era whose historical record is largely black-and-white proved to be a complicated process as well. The team researched to find the predominant paint colors of the time, scanned them in, and worked out their RGB values to reflect in their buildings accordingly. But that didn't make things easy: "The hardest thing you'll ever get with designing locations is working with costumes to make sure the characters don't blend into the walls," says Wood. "The problem we've got with Phelps is that there are hundreds of places he can go, literally. What color is the tarmac, what color is the sidewalk, what color are the generic buildings, what are the case location buildings? Crème was a popular color. Brown was a really popular color. So you really have to manage that color palette very, very well, so the player can always see where he is onscreen. That was a huge challenge for us."

2010 GAMES OF THE YEAR

Which Game Will Take the Prize?

It begins, as it does every year, with the nominees. Four editors pick their four favorite PS3 games, none of which can overlap with any other editor's choices. As if that's not tough enough, we then lock ourselves in a small, windowless room with no ventilation and nothing but discarded peach crates to sit on—and we don't leave until we unanimously crown a winner. It's an epic showdown, with laughter, tears, and a bit of hair pulling. But it's worth it, because these are PTOM's Game of the Year awards.

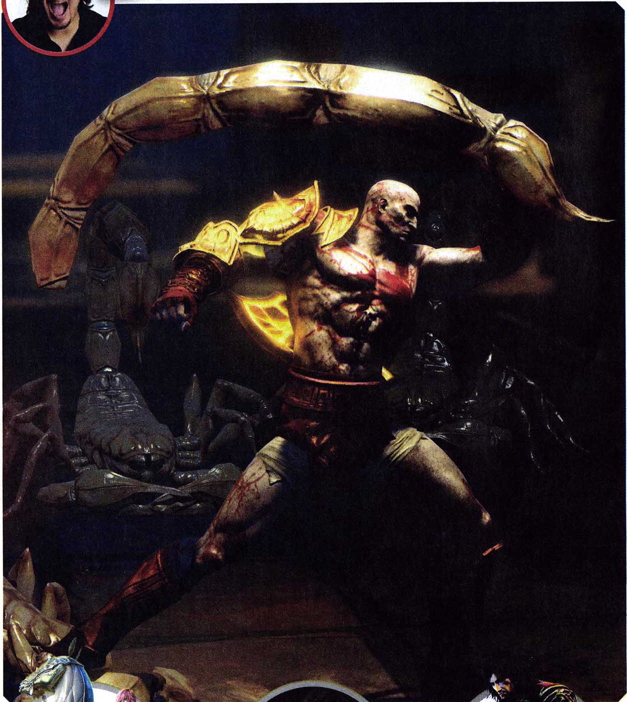
And the nominees are... ⏩

GARY STEINMAN

God of War III nominated for

The Heavy Hitter Award

It's my favorite formula in gaming: hit things, then they fall down. It's this precise formula that's propelled the *God of War* franchise from the very beginning, and it has since become a proven fact that when the math adds up, the result is brilliant fun. But while all of the franchise's games have delivered on this majestic gaming algorithm, it's **God of War III** that added the extra variables to elevate the experience in brutally delightful ways: Better graphics. More gore. Bigger bosses—heck, the biggest of them all in the now legendary Titan battles. Incredible characters. Unexpected moments of both tenderness and torture. It's not just epic, it's a game for the ages and one that won't likely be topped in this generation. I love *God of War III* because it reaches for the greatest heights, then lingers at the top pounding its chest in celebration of everything that's great about gaming. If that's not the winner of The Heavy Hitter Award, I don't know what is.



The Best Final Fantasy on PS3 Award

Yes, this game was polarizing—in part because it's so totally tubular. But **Final Fantasy XIII** truly is the best *Final Fantasy* on PS3, and not just because it's the only one. Great combat, lovely characters, and lush graphics make this a champ.

Even the Bizarre Voice Acting Can't Hold This Back Award

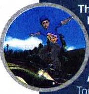
A French director, English voice actors, and several dubious American regional accents—that's **Heavy Rain** in a nutshell. Yet even the utter awkwardness of the vocal performances can't undo this brilliant, innovative, engrossing adventure.

The Best God of War Clone Award

Here's a funny thing: We seem to talk a lot about *God of War* clones, yet when we have to list them, we're hard-pressed to think of very many. Still, in a relatively uncrowded field, **Castlevania: Lords of Shadow** whipped its way to the front of the pack with its gorgeous visuals, tight gameplay, and deep combat.

Dishonorable Mentions

The Highly Coveted "Chopper, Sic Balls!" Award
Dead to Rights: Retribution

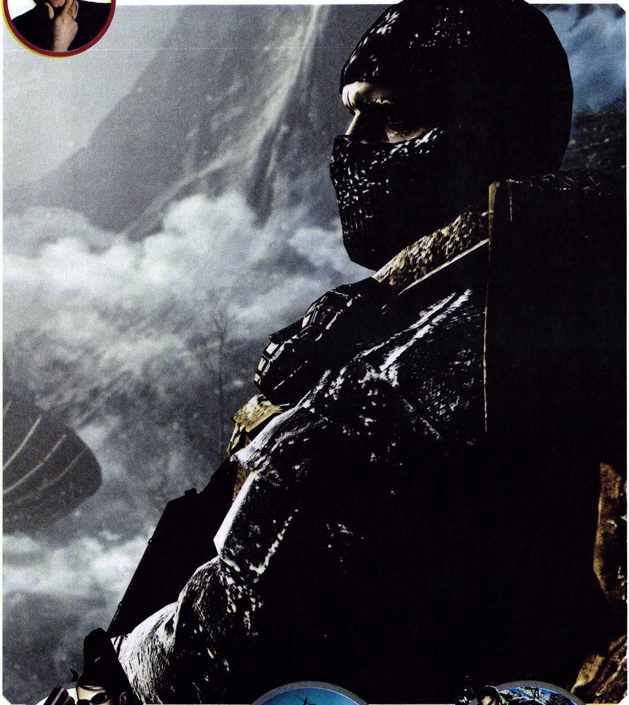


The Dear Lord, Stop Beating This Dead Horse Because Smoke Is Coming Out of the Corpse Award
Tony Hawk Shred

ROGER BURCHILL

Call Of Duty: Black Ops nominated for

The Shock and Awe Award



Few things are as hotly contested as the first-person shooter genre (except maybe the Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest or, perhaps soon, the Korean peninsula). Considering the level of competition, then, it is shock-and-awe-inspiring that **Call Of Duty: Black Ops** so clearly dominates the battlefield. There's no reinventing of the APC wheel here, just the consistent refining and sharpening of the fighting machine until it slices like the proverbial razor's edge. Nothing plays like or feels as good as a *Call Of Duty* game and *Black Ops* is simply the best-looking, most-absorbing entry the series has spawned. There was a time when the Treyarch-developed titles were mere fillers between the "real" *COD* games, but that time has clearly passed—now I wonder how the next Infinity Ward installment can possibly compare. While a certain opposing force might bristle, Treyarch deserves a Medal of Honor for efforts above and beyond the call of duty.

The Hair Apparent Award

If I could conjure the perfect woman, she would be a shapely brunette with fashionable eyewear and the ability to instantaneously contrive items—including her own clothing—from her hair. Fortunately, the woman of my dreams already exists in **Bayonetta**, one of the year's best action adventures.

The Race of a Lifetime Award

It seems inconceivable that this award isn't going to *Gran Turismo 5*, but in a year of great driving games (*Blur* and *Split/Second* also come to mind), **Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit** is the one that truly gives me the white line fever. Nothing compares to sticking it to the... er, to our fine traffic enforcement officers.

The Roger Burchill Award for the Game Roger Has Played Most

My **Just Cause 2** stats as they currently stand: 172 hours played, 99.82 percent completion, and there's *still* about 50 items I need to discover or destroy. Has there ever been a more destructo-happy time sink of a sandbox game? I think not.

Dishonorable Mentions

The Press X Award For Excellence in the Field of Pressing the X Button
Yakuza 3

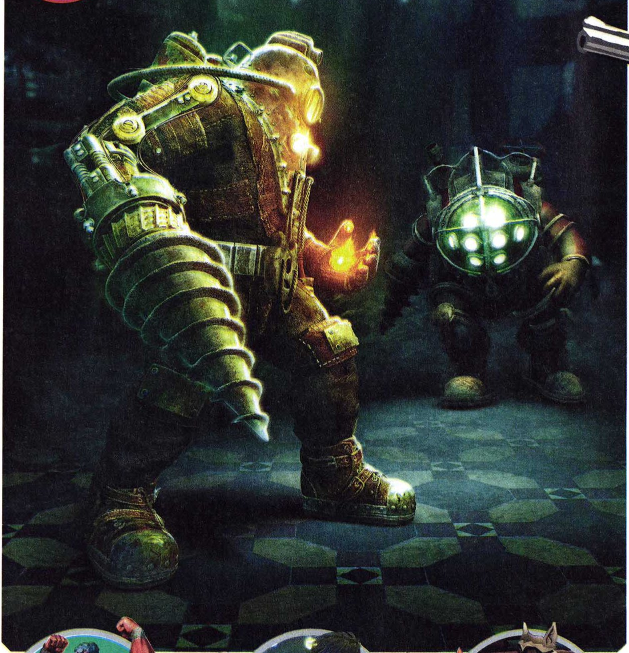
The Today's The Day The Teddy Bears Have Their Crappy Picnic Award
Naughty Bear

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

BioShock 2 nominated for

The Against All Odds Award

It was the sequel no one wanted. Despite the nearly unanimous praise heaped on the first *BioShock*, gamers balked at the idea of a follow-up, believing the first game stood on its own so well that a second game could only diminish the original's specialness. But in the face of all these doubts, the team at 2K Marin delivered **BioShock 2**, a game that was both worthy of the franchise and one of the best titles of 2010. The decision to not only return to Rapture but cast players as a Big Daddy was bold, but it paid off in the form of a more personal narrative and a deeper look at one of gaming's most compelling settings. Oh, and the ability to light a guy on fire before ramming a giant mechanized drill through his chest? Awesome. As a diehard fan, I was relieved, impressed, and made giddy by *BioShock 2*—despite the lack of mindf–cks on the level of the first's "Would you kindly?" Too bad it's another year until *BioShock: Infinite* hits.



Dishonorable Mentions

The John Daly ProStroke Golf Award For Criminal Misbehavior in a Videogame Award Kane and Lynch in *Kane & Lynch 2*

The Dynasty Warriors Award For Meritorious Service in the Field of Dynastic Warfare Tie: *Sengoku Basara* and *Fist of the North Star: Ken's Rage*

Best Discount Game

Oh, you heard me right. With dozens of characters, gorgeous graphics, and possibly the most well-oiled fighting mechanics ever to grace a console, it's easy to forget that **Super Street Fighter IV** cost just $40 at launch: I totally used the money I saved to buy a fight stick. So worth it.

Teacher of the Year Award

You know that inspiring high school teacher you had? The one who told you to follow your dreams? Well that guy's got nothing on **Rock Band 3**. With its remarkably robust music trainers, it can teach anyone how to rock for real, which is just about the coolest thing any game has ever done.

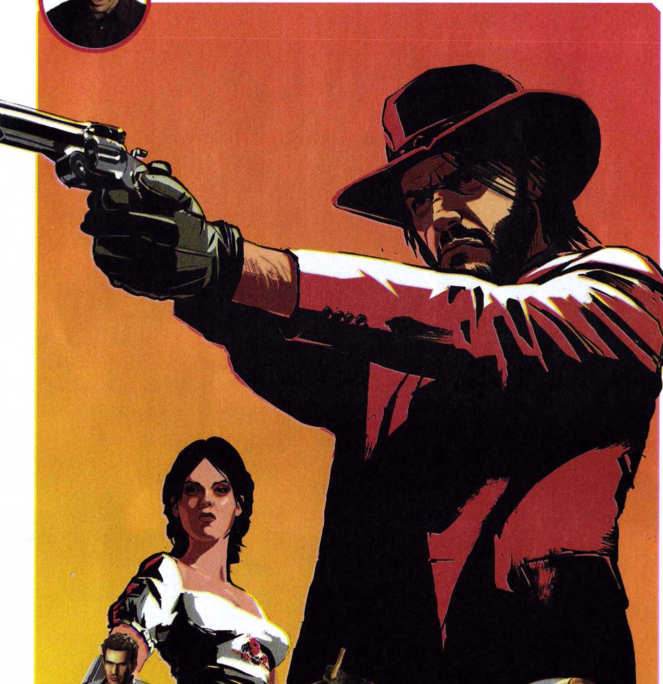
Game of the Year...2002

The games themselves may be old, but the brand new HD graphics are gorgeous and the content remains as charming as ever: anthropomorphic animals, light-hearted noir themes, grand larceny—pretty much everything I want in a game. If only the **Sly Cooper Collection** had come out sooner!

GREG ORLANDO

Red Dead Redemption nominated for

The Best Western Award



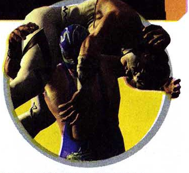
For sporting spurs and a bandolier when no other game even dreamed of pulling off that look, Rockstar's **Red Dead Redemption** earns the coveted Greg Orlando Best Western (The Genre, Not The Hotel Chain) Award. It's easy to slap together a shooter set during the tumultuous American Old West; *Redemption*, however, is a true period piece, capturing both the dustiness and the desperation felt during the country's move toward the modern era. From its wide-open prairies to its darkened poker rooms, *Redemption* speaks to a time when things really were wild and when a man seeking respite from the law might ride out into the distance to escape it. Through John Marston, I got to experience Western life as a real gunslinger might have, with duels, whores, card cheats, animal skins, and sweet, sweet revenge under the stifling sun. I also gained a healthy appreciation for jaunty hats, trusty steeds, and the word "y'all."

The Brainiest Game Award

Dead Rising 2 sees magicians stabbing one another, a lawman committing impromptu hangings, and a chef deep-frying his own face. And that doesn't even hint at the violence that can be leveled on its zombies. For violence above and beyond the call of good taste, *Dead Rising 2* is honored as the "brainiest" game.

The Gamiest Bugs Award

Some games have bugs. This is true. But the bugs that were **Fallout: New Vegas** actually had a game. But when it wasn't ruining lives and corrupting game saves, *Vegas* was enthralling, so much so that I personally spent close to a hundred hours wandering through its wasteland.



The Best Mexican Wrestling Game Award

Although the competition was fierce among all the other Mexican wrestling videogames, **Lucha Libre AAA: Heroes Del Ring** wins simply because it couldn't be more Mexican if it came with a burrito and was personally autographed by Felipe Calderón.

Ken's Picks

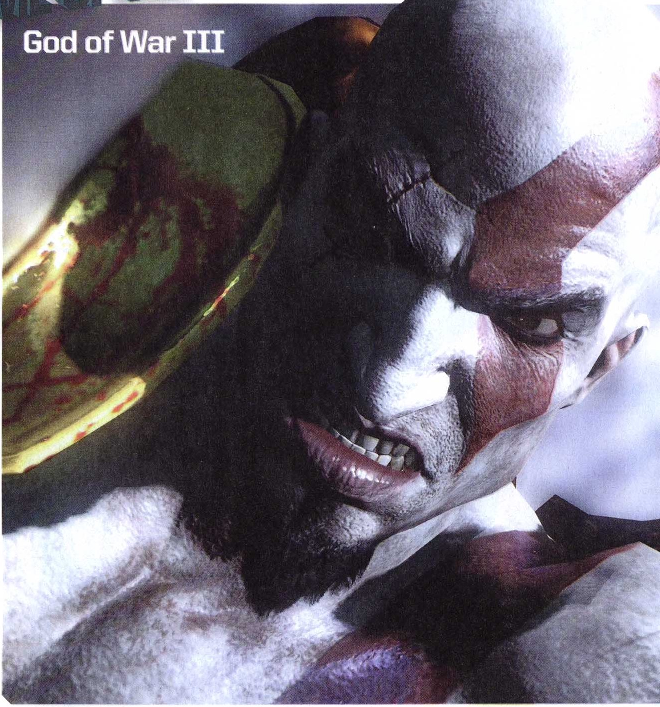
The Dani Alvez "Who Wants to Play Defense Anyway?" Award
Pro Evo Soccer 2011

Best Driving/ Disaster Game
Split/Second

The Game *Exactly* as Boring and Exciting as Real Baseball
MLB 10: The Show

PS3 GAME OF THE YEAR

God of War III



A year ago, I never thought I would be writing this. We were in the middle of a grueling final push to complete God of War III, and during Christmas I brought the game home to play through the latest build. I knew we had a lot of work left, but this was ridiculous—so many bugs, so many missing parts, so much left to polish. I still believed this game could be incredible, but with what little time there was left, things were looking grim. If we were going to get this done the right way, we are going to need a Christmas miracle.

Well, we got that miracle. The God of War team always finishes strong, but I have never seen them finish this strong, reminding me that this group has no shortage of dedication and passion. In three weeks they transformed a mess into a masterpiece. After countless play-throughs of the game, for the first time I wasn't seeing faults, I was having fun! Simply put, the game was amazing.

I want to thank the team for making the miracle possible. I am so proud to be a part of this group! I would also like to thank our families for supporting us through all the late nights and weekends. And finally, I want to thank the fans for displaying the same kind of dedication and passion for God of War III that went into making it.

—Stig Asmussen
Game Director

RUNNERS UP

Red Dead Redemption
The closest contender in a hotly contested year. The best non-PlayStation exclusive game on the system.

Heavy Rain
For its ambition alone, it's a worthy choice. The fact that they pulled off this innovative and intense adventure makes it more admirable.

Call Of Duty: Black Ops
Not just the best solo shooter of the year, but the best multiplayer one as well. Hats off to Treyarch for far surpassing expectations.

PSP GAME OF THE YEAR

Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker

Simply put, this was a no-brainer. **Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker** took everything great about the *Metal Gear* games and put it into the palms of our hands. Toss in a *Pokémon*-like recruitment feature, an off-battlefield development system with the depth of a sports management sim, top-notch multiplayer and co-op missions, and it's the clear winner.

Considering that the western handheld market is much smaller than the console market, MGS: Peace Walker *was a challenging and ambitious project for our team. Nevertheless, it was our goal to provide a true* Metal Gear Solid *experience to all gamers and it brings me great joy that* Peace Walker *has been recognized as game of the year. Thank you very much.*

—Hideo Kojima
Producer and Director

RUNNER'S UP

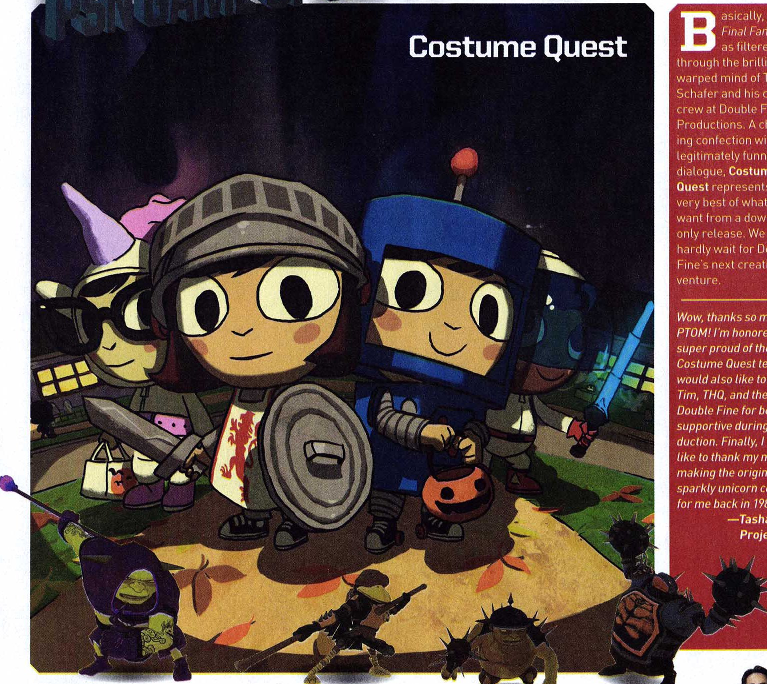
God of War: Ghost of Sparta
A perfect PSP experience and a must-play on the system. Only nudged out because of *Peace Walker's* innovations.

Valkyria Chronicles II
A strategy/action RPG hybrid that's as good as the PS3 game—and arguably on the system that it's best suited for.

Invizimals
Our kids and kid brothers keep borrowing our PSPs. For them, this is among the best family-friendly games ever.

PSN GAME OF THE YEAR

Costume Quest



Basically, it's *Final Fantasy X-2* as filtered through the brilliantly warped mind of Tim Schafer and his creative crew at Double Fine Productions. A charming confection with legitimately funny dialogue, **Costume Quest** represents the very best of what we want from a download-only release. We can hardly wait for Double Fine's next creative venture.

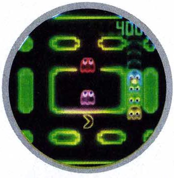
Wow, thanks so much, PTOM! I'm honored and super proud of the whole Costume Quest team. I would also like to thank Tim, THQ, and the rest of Double Fine for being so supportive during production. Finally, I would like to thank my mom for making the original sparkly unicorn costume for me back in 1985.

—Tasha Harris
Project Lead

RUNNERS UP

Joe Danger
The quintessential indie gem. Stunt-cycler Joe Danger's quest for glory puts fun first, second, third, and last.

Scott Pilgrim vs. The World
Brilliant retro style and ample nods to gaming nostalgia perfectly capture the personality of the beloved comics.

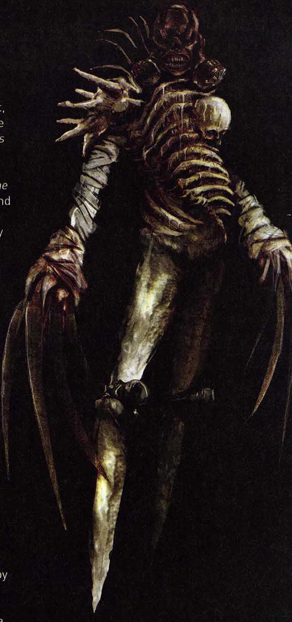


Pac-Man: Championship Edition DX
An all-consuming reboot of the arcade classic that surpasses the original with inventive modes and addictive challenges.

WORLD EXCLUSIVE SCREENS
PlayStation The Official Magazine

SHADOWS OF THE DAMNED

BY GREG ORLANDO



Before his booze-fueled death by misadventure, rock singer Bon Scott, front man for AC/DC, told tales of the highway to hell. He also noted, *"If this is hell, then you can say, 'It's heavenly.' Hell ain't a bad place to be."*

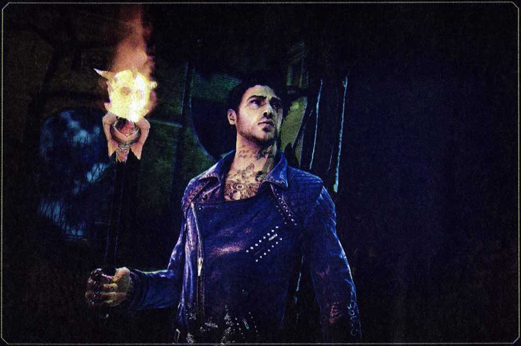
Hell in the third-person shooter *Shadows of the Damned* is awful. It's alternately freezing cold and burning hot, and the absence of light will kill anyone who's not already dead. It's populated by demons. Killer demons.

It is not a bad place to be.

Shepherding the project is the Japanese dream team Grasshopper Manufacture. Goichi Suda (aka Suda51) serves as the game's executive director. *Resident Evil's* creator Shinji Mikami is the executive producer, and *Damned's* soundtrack comes courtesy of Akira Yamaoka.

There's a sense of rock star swagger here, backed up by three impressive résumés. Each has a very tangible role to play and talent to impart. Suda's style is celebrated in previous Grasshopper Manufacture titles such as the noir, cel-shaded, and on-rails shooter *Killer7* and the hack-and-slash *No More Heroes* series for the Nintendo Wii. Mikami, arguably, originated the survival horror genre with the *Resident Evil* series and has a talent for creating tension and dread in his games. Konami's creepy *Silent Hill* series owes a debt of gratitude to Yamaoka for his haunting scores.

With this triumvirate on the job, *Damned* has a fighting chance, and a hellishly fine one at that.



Welcome to Hell

They drink booze in hell. It's the only way protagonist Garcia Hotspur can restore his depleted health.

Hotspur is human, a demon hunter, and love-struck. His face is scarred, his body covered with tattoos. His leather jacket seems to be bejeweled. "For the sake of his love Paula, he'll go through fire, water, and even toilets to save her," Suda says. Suda named Hotspur after the Shakespearian character, but notes it's also a reference to the English hero Sir Henry Percy, who lead a rebellion against monarch Henry IV in 1403, and an homage to one of his favorite soccer teams.

Damned has Hotspur cast into hell, looking for the kidnapped Paula. He holds on his throat, inked into his skin, the following promise: "I would kill the world before it did you harm." Woven into the tattoo is another inscription to exorcise demons—something Hotspur will need to do throughout the course of his sojourn.

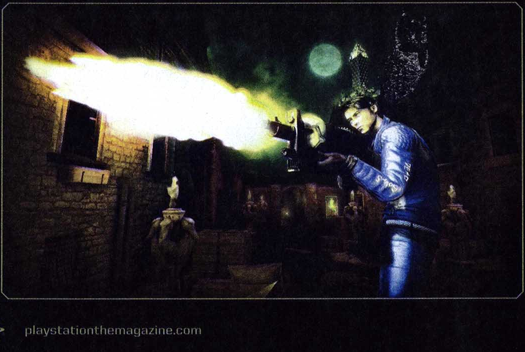
Hell has opera, neon signs welcoming visitors to it, and vending machines. Hotspur can stroll past signs advertising "Strawberry Sh–tcake," and it's best not to dwell on what *Damned* has to say about the composition of the fruit...although it is also far too delightful to avoid mentioning. Strawberries, *Damned* explains, are a prank—a demons' joke on the mortal world. They're made of ground-up human tongues.

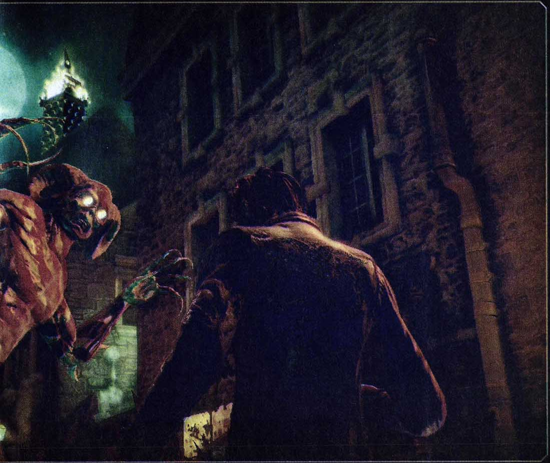
"The hell in *Damned* is close to a place someone might live," Suda says. "It has its own rules and ecology. The demons that exist in hell are living in a hierarchy. And unlike Dante's version of hell, this version of hell is very close to the real world."

This hell is built to jump and grab at everyone's nerves, too. Suda and company refer to the game as a psychological action thriller. "Playing the game will evoke a 'psychological' experience," Suda says, cryptically.

Our world-exclusive stroll through *Damned's* hell at Electronic Arts' sprawling northern California headquarters on a crisp winter afternoon puts this statement in perspective. If nothing else, *Damned* has personality—and creepiness—to spare.

The game world perpetually shifts its colors, tones, and hues to set a mood. At times it's oversaturated in blue or red or orange; at other times, it's bathed in a

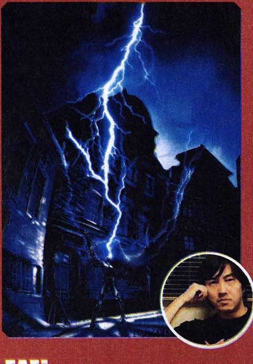




"Light is no friend to demons. And darkness is no friend to Garcia." –Goichi Suda, executive producer

writhing, pulsing blackness Hotspur cannot exist in for long. Blackness-infused portals of hell must be traversed in order to progress through the game's worlds, but they're deadly to Hotspur. He has to race through them, his health depleting all the while, and race out of them. "Light is no friend to demons," Suda says, "and darkness is no friend to Garcia."

Huge ornamental hands open to pour forth a stream of darkness. Goat-head torches must be shot to light Hotspur's path in places. Doors are guarded by baby demons fixed onto circular plaques, and they require food before they'll give way. Hotspur jamming brains into a baby demon's maw can only be described as unsettling.



Wise Grasshopper

Goichi Suda, also known as Suda51 (this being a play on words that works far better in Japanese than English), has built an impressive team with Grasshopper Manufacture. Now, in a contemplative moment, he's taken some time out to answer even more questions about his company's third-person shooter.

With such a mix of creative genius, is there any reason to worry the game's vision might be compromised?

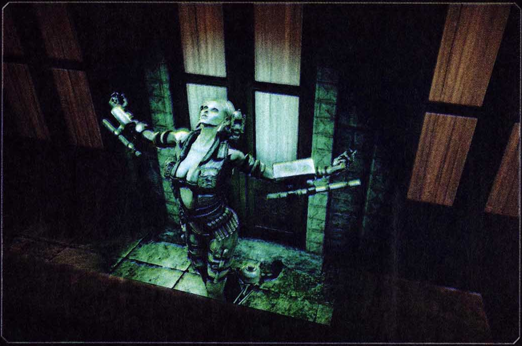
No, everyone's focus is aligned. It's hard to put it into words, but you can clearly feel that everyone is on the same track. There's a collective synergy between Mikami, Yamaoka, and myself.

Why was *Shadows of the Damned* chosen as the game's title?

One of the main reasons is that I'm a big fan of the legendary punk band, The Damned. The other reasons will become clearer as we unveil more of the game's story.

Tell us about more about Garcia.

Garcia has no problem holding his liquor. Oh, and no one pulls off leather like Garcia. And he looks good with tattoos!



Damned to Greatness

As he travels through hell, Garcia Hotspur will be tormented not only by demons but by visions of Paula. At one point, she appears to him, headless. Her body shambles to find its head and, fully restored, she'll peel her flesh to reveal a skinless demon underneath.

"Demons are like men," Hotspur's flaming-skull torch notes. "They all try to get inside the prettiest girl."

Now this might seem odd in a lesser title, but it's fitting here: Hotspur's flaming-skull torch talks. A lot. The torch's name is Johnson, and it's really a demon who's aligned itself with the protagonist. The two have a history, but no one at Electronic Arts or Grasshopper Manufacture will currently elaborate on it.

Johnson is at once yappy ally, tool, and tour guide. It transforms into a torch and three stylish demonic weapons. Its machine-gun analog is the Teether, a rapid-fire killer assaulting foes with demon teeth. It has a shotgun-type weapon in the bone-firing Boner, and the launcher Monocussioner shoots skulls. Collecting gems—hell does have beautiful things, it seems—spewed from executed demons allows Hotspur to boost the weapons' potency and enhance attributes such as rate of fire. A second tier of upgrades further augments the weapons to include physical alterations influencing the weapons' look and power.

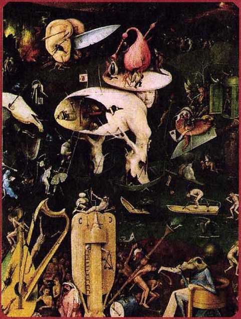
Combat, as befitting a rock-, jazz-, and opera-powered jaunt through the underworld, is brassy and loud. Vertical blood streaks smear the screen at every opportunity. Enemies who've shrouded themselves in a viscous, goopy darkness need to be attacked with Johnson as a torch to remove the protective shield before they can be destroyed for good. Hotspur's punches are overly exaggerated, thudding like hammers on meat slabs, and the protagonist can dispatch foes by, say, jumping and stamping on their prone bodies. More exotic kills are rewarded with more gems that can, in turn, be redeemed for alcohol or weapon upgrades.

Ultimately, Hotspur will need to plow through hell, violently shooting and pummeling its lesser imps, tearing through its arch demons (one of which features spinning bladed hands and a convenient shining red tumor on its back), and proceed on to Flemming, the fiend who kidnapped Paula. Flemming's identity and appearance

"Demons are like men. They all try to get inside the prettiest girl." –Johnson, flaming-skull torch

remain a mystery for now, but the game does cite his love for opera. When Hotspur voices his incredulity over this, Johnson sarcastically replies, "What? You thought he'd be the emo type?"

In a game as strange and, possibly, as wonderful as *Shadows of the Damned,* Hotspur should really know better. It's best not to make any premature assumptions, here, save for perhaps one. This summer, upon *Damned's* release, hell really might turn out to be *heavenly.*

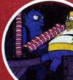


Hellish

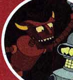
From biblical times to the distant future, four of PTOM's favorite visions of hell.

Biblical Hell
Mentioned in the New Testament and painted by artists such as Hieronymous Bosch. Considering there's no donuts or singing, it's likely best avoided.

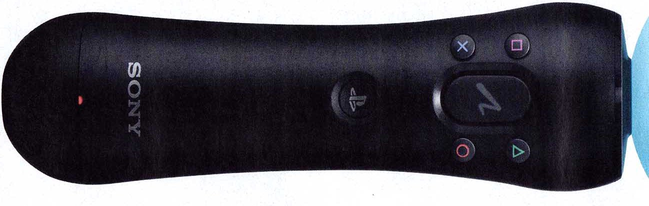
The Divine Comedy
Dante Alighieri's hell, detailed in his epic poem, has nine levels. None come recommended, although purgatory, which is just outside hell, seems like a fairly decent option. Overall, though, best avoided.



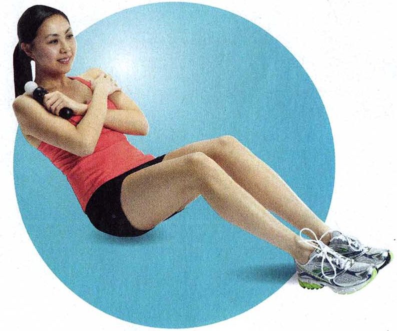
The Simpsons
When Homer Simpson ate a forbidden donut given to him by the devil Flanders ("Treehouse of Horror IV"), he was sent to Hell Labs' Ironic Punishment Division where he was strapped into a machine and force-fed donuts.

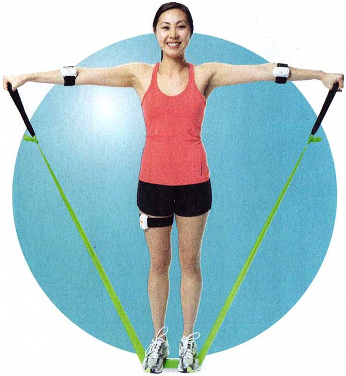


Futurama
In the episode "Hell is Other Robots," Bender the automaton found himself cast into robot hell. There, the robot devil performed a musical number threatening to make Bender suffer until the end of time, enduring punishments, most of which rhyme.



5 steps





① **Quad of War**

EA Sports Active 2 taught me the meaning of "no pain, no gain."

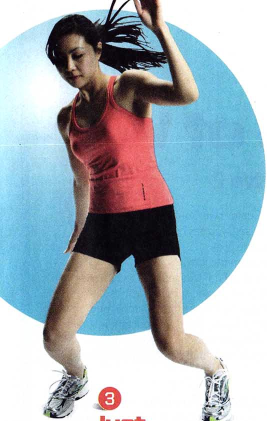
② **Core Galore**

Get Fit with Mel B told me what it really really wants: More sit-ups and push-ups.

to a fitter you

By Anne Lewis

A new year...a new me? That was my resolution, and this time I'm sticking with it. After purging my fridge of holiday leftovers and clearing out some space in my living room, I picked up five PS3 fitness titles to help me make good on my promise. What follows here is my exercise adventure, from dancing to tennis. Use it as a guide to getting back in shape or, perhaps, as a cautionary tale...



③

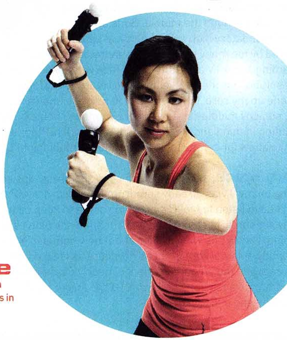
Just Dance

Dance Dance Revolution changed the way I think about arrows forever.

④

Rhythm Method

Zumba Fitness wanted to show me how to bust a move, but I showed it how to fail.



⑤

Arms Race

It took some mighty stamina to shoot those virtual arrows in *Sports Champion*.

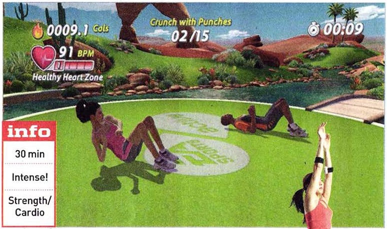
Photos by Mark Madeo

Quad of War

EA Sports Active 2

Pick Your Torture "Custom workout where I can pick my own exercises, you say? That sounds grand!" That was me pre-*Sports Active 2.* Running in place, mime jump roping, squats, and lunges are cruel mistresses who taught me that perhaps I should stick with my proper spouse, laziness. Somewhere between shouting at my trainer to slow down and throwing up my hands in anger, I learned a very important lesson: "Anne, you need to stretch before you work out." Apparently I never paid attention to any gym teacher I ever had. There's a nasty knot in my arm because of this.

Ready to Burst *EA Sports Active 2* has a nine-week program promising fabulous abs but took me to a circle of hell I never knew existed. For 30 minutes I cried, laughed hysterically, then cried some more while I took one for the team and did sit-ups until I thought my stomach might burst from my body á la *Alien.* However, I warmed-up with *Dance Dance Revolution* and cooled down with *Sports Champions,* which made the pain from the mock jump shots paired with "riding a bicycle" somewhat more tolerable.



info
30 min
Intense!
Strength/ Cardio

Those arm and leg bands are actually heart rate monitors that tracked my activity.

The monitors are great if you want a serious workout but terrible if you're me.

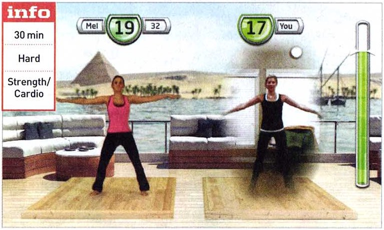
Now if only my heart rate could teach me how to shoot a basketball for real...

Core Galore

Get Fit with Mel B

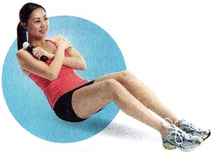
Stuck in the Middle Like many gamers, I've started to notice myself becoming a little softer around the middle. Gone are the days of mandatory high school physical education, replaced by too many nights sitting on my couch until 3 a.m. screaming at my TV and stuffing my face with takeout. But part of my resolution for the new year was to return to my former glory and tone up my core. (For those of you who are unaware, your core is the squishy middle-ish area where your abs should be.) With this resolution in mind and *Mel B* in hand, I cleared the floor of my living room to allow for comfortable sit-up and eventual fainting room.

Scary Spice, Indeed Crunches and press-ups and squats, oh my! I was already sore from *EA Sports Active 2* and then I had to listen to Mel B squawking at me to keep up with her. Slowly but surely I began to lag and although she didn't say anything, I knew she was *thinking* about how pathetic I was. Thankfully, this workout is not as hardcore as I feared it might be, so I was saved the embarrassment of nearly passing out in front of my roommate again. She still won't let me forget my whining toward the end of *EA Sports Active 2.*



info
30 min
Hard
Strength/ Cardio

Wait, so when did push-ups became press-ups?



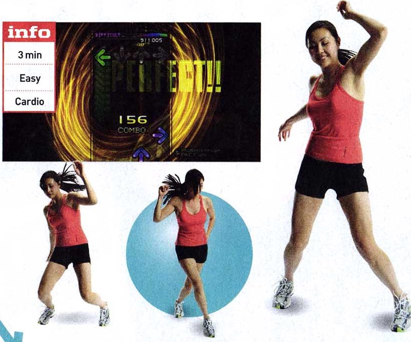
How does the Move controller measure sit-ups? Carefully.

Just Dance

Dance Dance Revolution

Swinging Singles There's not much challenge in a single song, but I figured it'd be a decent warm-up if I upped the difficulty level. Unfortunately, on higher difficulties I lost all ability to control my limbs and was subsequently booed off the pad. Still, a little Lady Gaga is a nice way to ease into a workout routine.

Tune Up Club mode, on the other hand, builds a random playlist with songs of varying difficulties, which proved to be better than the single song I played in preparation for my hellish descent into *Sports Active* misery. The warm-up worked best when the playlist began with a slower, easier song and progressively got harder from there...though that didn't always happen. Still, stomping on all those arrows helped prep me for the harder stuff.

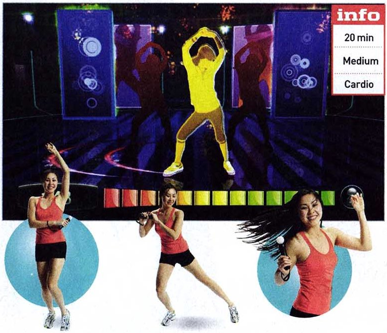


info

3 min

Easy

Cardio



info

20 min

Medium

Cardio

Rhythm Method

Zumba Fitness

Foot Fault I always knew I wasn't going to be a ballerina when I grew up because ballerinas don't fall over while standing still. However, I was hoping I would at least be able to mimic some beginner dance moves. I was wrong. What the woman was doing on the screen was dancing. What I was doing was something completely different.

Dance Fever As I learned the hard way, the world of weight loss is brutal. *Zumba* threw me straight into a dance with no instructions and told me to mimic the woman on the screen. I flapped my arms and legs wildly through a rock-'n'-roll jam, wiggled my hips to a merengue beat, and pretended to be a snake while belly dancing. None of it looked good, but it was still fun as hell.

Arms Race

Sports Champion

Bow Flex While not much of a workout on its own, *Sports Champion* was good for stamina. I mixed gladiator duels and archery and got a bit of a stretch in my arms. I actually found archery to be more strenuous than dueling. I felt a sore spot on the back of my shoulders the next day that I just know came from holding my arms at unusual angles.

Net Gains I tried out table tennis and volleyball as well to see if they would fit into my workout. I gave up on table tennis incredibly quickly because I'm a sore loser and was offended by my opponent's victory dance, but I managed to make volleyball a decent workout by running around my living room and jumping and diving for the ball. My furniture did not appreciate this.

info

15 min

Easy

Strength

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PlayStation The Official Magazine Reviews

Your essential guide to new releases

Space, it seems, can be a cruel, unforgiving place. It is there, hidden in the infinite darkness of the cosmos, that we'll stumble upon the greatest horrors lurking in the shadows, ready to dismember us—or, preferably, be dismembered by us. It is there that we'll find Isaac Clarke, ready to once again engage in combat of the mortal variety with all kinds of creepy, crawly horrors—and to that we give thanks, because *Dead Space 2*, it turns out, is a game that will terrify as much as it delights. But *Dead Space 2* is not alone in the night sky, because another game has also emerged to bring us to the outer reaches of the universe, and this one is pure delight. *Mass Effect 2* has finally landed on PS3 and it's ready to take us on an epic journey unlike any other, with a menagerie of alien lifeforms that we can fight, befriend, or even mate with if we're so inclined. Because space, apparently, also provides ample opportunity for love. Speaking of which, love might be the best word to describe the final leg of our galactic journey, with *LittleBigPlanet 2* offering infinite possibilities to be charmed by the creative minds of the PS3 collective, thanks to its remarkably powerful tools for building brave new worlds.

MASS EFFECT 2

Worth the wait? Yes. Yes, indeed. *Mass Effect 2* is the sci-fi epic that plays like a favorite novel, with unforgettable characters who we've come to adore.

LITTLEBIGPLANET 2

If only the Sackbot existed in the real world. We would program him to do our chores, then spend the rest of our free time playing this game.

GRAN TURISMO 5

The legendary racer just missed our deadline last month, but that's a mere pit stop on the race of life. This month, our final verdict on the long-awaited game. Was the ride worth the wait?

How we score our reviews...

10 Awesome Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.

9 Excellent Highly recommended and a great investment.

8 Great Wonderful yet still possessed of minor flaws.

7 Good Enjoyable, but with definite room for improvement.

6 Acceptable A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Mediocre A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Flawed Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.

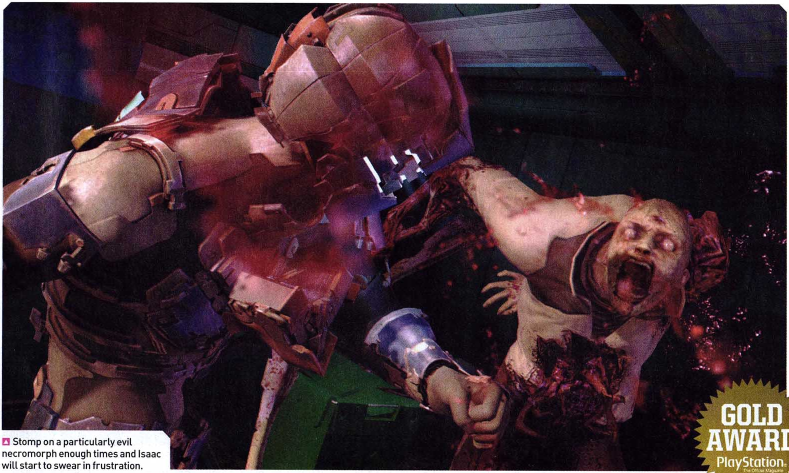
3 Poor A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.

1 Raw Sewage Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

GOLD AWARD PlayStation

Our Highest Accolade The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.



Stomp on a particularly evil necromorph enough times and Isaac will start to swear in frustration.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Dead Space 2

Flight of the Living Dead

Just one more save point… Just one more save point… Just one more save point. Every few hours or so, we would start muttering this repeatedly, trying to convince ourselves to stop, to put the controller down, to let our pent up anxiety and frustration and exhaustion subside. But we never could. We had to keep going. We had to dive deeper into our own deteriorating mental state. We had to learn more about the outbreak and the Marker and the people responsible for these atrocities.

We had to keep killing necromorphs.

That's the power of *Dead Space 2:* It's a nerve-wracking onslaught of death and terror that grabbed us by the throat, slammed us into a wall, and dared us not to look away. Though occasionally uneven, it manages to polish the core ideas of the original game into something truly great: an artful, gruesome, and unrelentingly intense deep-space shooter bathed in blood and conspiracy.

Space Case

In place of the first game's relatively small mining ship, *Space 2* offers an entire space station overrun with legions of reanimated corpses—the victims of a virus-like alien infestation that transforms dead flesh into grotesque killing machines. And just as the classic necromorphs return, so does everyman engineer Isaac Clarke, who must once again outrun the undead horde as he attempts to understand what's happening to him.

The premise is nearly identical to that of first game, but the circumstances are substantially different: Isaac has no knowledge of why he's on The Sprawl or even how he got there (though it quickly becomes apparent why his memory is blank). He essentially wakes up during the early stages of the outbreak and has no time to question why he's being chased by the station's security forces or plagued with disturbing and potentially deadly hallucinations. All he can do is follow the instructions of his dubious allies in a room-by-room struggle for survival.

The game's conspiracies and Isaac's growing dementia definitely kept us invested in the action (especially now that Isaac actually speaks and has transformed into a fairly likable badass), but the narrative is still the game's weakest link: The well-developed cult of Unitology from the original game has been all but forgotten, replaced by the far more

▶▶

Want More?
Did you know that *Dead Space 2* comes with a game within the game? That's right, former Wii exclusive *Dead Space: Extraction*—a rail shooter that lets players aim and shoot using the Move controller—is included at no extra charge.

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Electronic Arts **Dev** Visceral Games **Price** $59.99 **ESRB** Mature **It's like** *BioShock* in space…with more gore…and less Ayn Rand.

Some questions—like "What triggered the outbreak?"—are never answered.

generic Earth Gov; the Marker—a manmade recreation of a mysterious alien artifact—remains a confusing and overly convenient all-purpose plot device; and events often take an eternity to develop since supporting characters are few and far between.

Give Us a Hand

Still, *Space 2* avoids the contrived plot twists of the first game, offers a few neat revelations, and delivers a satisfying ending. Plus, it leads to dozens of truly traumatizing moments: hanging upside down from a train car that just smashed through a wall, desperately picking off the monsters shambling toward us; dodging living missiles while manually adjusting solar panels in space as our oxygen starts to run out; watching helplessly as a panic-stricken victim strapped to an operating table is slowly eviscerated just a few feet away. And that's not even the worst of it.

The sheer variety is mindboggling, but the diversity of environments within The Sprawl allows for all sorts of unexpected scenarios—from subterranean mines to a children's daycare center. And gone are the tedious fetch quests of the original game. Instead, we get things like nail-biting boss battles and full control in zero gravity situations—which are not only astoundingly cool but brilliantly executed as well. The near-silent sound treatment, the realistic reactions of floating objects, even the controls seem completely appropriate and spot-on.

In fact, if *Space 2's* story seems weak, it's only in comparison to the nearly flawless core mechanics. The controls are consistently fast, tight, and responsive—exactly how we like it. The camera never drew attention to itself, which is exactly what a good camera *should* do. The sound design, though perhaps not quite equal to the award-winning achievement of the first game, still creeped us the hell out, and the visuals (the lighting in particular) are gorgeous and add a real grit and believability to the entire experience. In general, the game's technical execution easily places it within the realm of other triple-A titles.

As a result, *Space 2's* satisfying gameplay shines brighter than a burning space station. With no nagging issues pulling us out of the action, we were able to completely immerse

Frightline *Dead Space 2's* rank on the scare scale

Scary

Resident Evil 5
The "zombies" here were freaky, but this game's focus on macho action kept the experience pretty tame.

Scarier

BioShock
Though not technically a horror title, *BioShock's* atmospheric setting kept us on edge and had us plenty jumpy.

Scarier Still

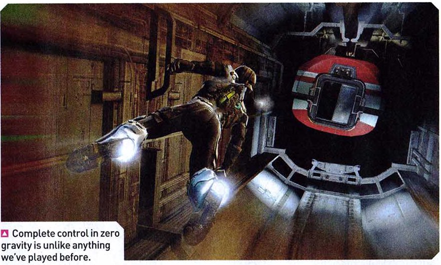
Dead Space 2
Being cornered and swarmed by a non-stop flood of bloodthirsty monsters tends to fray the nerves a bit.

Scariest

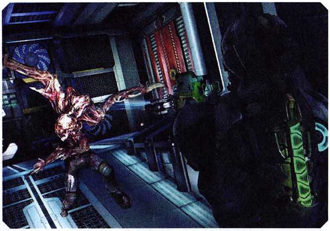
Dead Space
As the first game in the series, we had no idea what to expect. That element of surprise created serious tension.

AAAAAHHH!!

Silent Hill 2
This game is nothing short of a complete psychological meltdown. Very possibly the scariest game ever.



Complete control in zero gravity is unlike anything we've played before.



Now that we've seen them before, necromorphs are slightly less terrifying but still uglier than ever.

ourselves in the cathartic (and spectacularly gory) dismemberment of countless necromorphs. And trust us, shooting enemies' limbs off with mining tools feels far more rewarding than simply pumping them full of bullets until they fall over. God bless Visceral Games for breaking the typical rifle/shotgun/pistol mold by including some seriously fun and creative weaponry.

The Horror! The Horror!

The pleasantly unique "specialized guns vs. melee-based enemies" dynamic isn't the only option anymore though, thanks mainly to the new weapons and enemy types. The Pack, for instance, are easy to kill but attack in groups, so it's far easier to spray them with the assault rifle than dismember them individually. We also found it easier to blow up the attack dog-like Stalkers with the Detonator—which lays *BioShock 2*-style proximity mines—than to take out their legs with the plasma cutter.

We certainly appreciate the new strategies and added variety these changes create, but they also represent a subtle shift in the game's focus: Action plays a bigger role in *Space 2* than it did in the first game. While it's by no means a mindless run-'n'-gun shooter (we still had to conserve ammo and scour for supplies), we spent more time wielding our weapons than we did in the last game. In fact, by the end, every room seemed to contain an endless supply of angry necromorphs. At points it even felt slightly unbalanced: When we're nailing every shot and blasting every visible creature with the immobilizing stasis power and *still* getting worked, it just feels unfair.

Gasp List

SPOILED CHILDREN

The Pack
Their freaky screams are no match for our bullets.

GROSS OUT

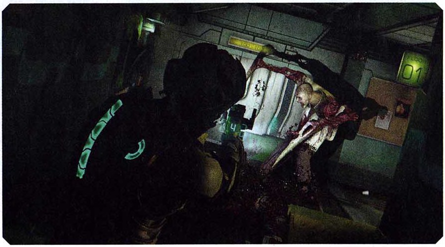
Pukers
Don't get nailed by their projectile vomit or Isaac will slow to a crawl.

BAD, BAD DOGS

Stalkers
These guys wait, watch, and then bum rush Isaac. Use stasis!

INTO THE WIND

Spitters
Possibly the toughest enemies in the game. Beware their ranged attack.



> "*Dead Space 2* surpasses the original in every capacity."

In many ways, the game has traded tension for intensity. *Space 2* is still plenty scary, but it's more of the in-your-face and panic-inducing variety than the first game's sense of constant tension and dread. There's now a rhythm to the action that, in turn, makes the game more predictable. With The Sprawl's police force constantly tracking us, we never felt too desperately alone—but we still held our breath every time we entered a new room.

Monster Mash

At a cool 10 to 12 hours, the campaign is reasonably substantial, but *Space 2* also comes equipped with a creative multiplayer effort. One team plays as standard human soldiers, but each member of the opposing team can spawn as any of four necromorph types. The humans must complete a multi-faceted objective within a specified time limit while the necromorphs simply have to eat the other team alive. We enjoyed spitting caustic goo on our opponents, but ultimately it lacks the addictive depth of more time-tested multiplayer games like *Call Of Duty*. It's fun for sure, but not a reason in itself to buy the game.

Fortunately, the single-player campaign is. With meticulous polish, top-quality gameplay, and more than enough scream-like-a-little-girl moments, *Space 2* surpasses the original in every capacity. Factor in its gruesome dismemberments and spectacular zero-G and there's truly nothing else like it. **SCOTT BUTTERWORTH**

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GOLD AWARD
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The Official Magazine

Shepard has many worthy romance options, but our favorites are Tali and Garrus.

Mass Effect 2

The galaxy's finest

The odds are grim. As the most advanced experimental starship in the known galaxy is ruthlessly torn asunder by a massive alien vessel, its commander rushes to evacuate his crew. Finally jettisoned by an enemy blast, Commander Shepard shoots into the vacuum of space like a speck of dust blasted by an angry wind. His suit punctured, he desperately flails in zero-G until his body goes limp.

Fast forward two years and Shepard awakens groggily after a painstaking regeneration process—the first of its kind even in this medically advanced future. Shepard's death and subsequent reanimation by the murky Cerberus organization mark both a literal and symbolic rebirth for the series. Fine-tuning has transformed the gameplay on every level, taking the best from both the shooter and RPG genres to create a masterpiece of game design—all set against the backdrop of a gripping science fiction story on par with some of our favorite novels.

Magic Bullets

At its core, *Mass Effect 2* is a third-person, cover-based shooter—except that it's so much more. Combat is malleable to suit a range of styles, so meaning we could, if so inclined, play it as a straight shooter. But there's also a wealth of tactical options to explore, and we found it not only possible but equally satisfying to ruin our enemies without firing a shot. Various customizable powers like biotic abilities (think telekinesis to the extreme) and tech specialties complement the gunplay nicely with a mix of support powers and brute force.

Here's how it works: Any time during battle, we can hit L2 or R2 to freeze the action and bring up a wheel with the guns or powers for Shepard and his

Info

PS3
INCLUDES 5+ HOURS OF BONUS MISSIONS
MASS EFFECT 2
M
EA

Format PS3
Pub Electronic Arts
Dev BioWare
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like the coolest science fiction novel we've ever played.

Five Friends Memorable allies from the original Mass Effect

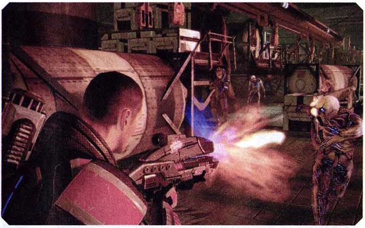
TALI'ZORAH NAR RAYYA
A young quarian technical genius on a pilgrimage.

LIARA T'SONI
An asari scientist with powerful biotic abilities. Easily the best romance option.

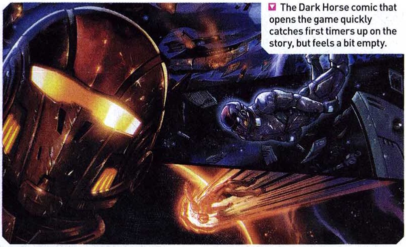
ASHLEY WILLIAMS
A human raised in a military family. She's also a total xenophobic jerk.

GARRUS VAKARIAN
A thoroughly likeable turian, but a character who doesn't blossom until *Mass Effect 2*.

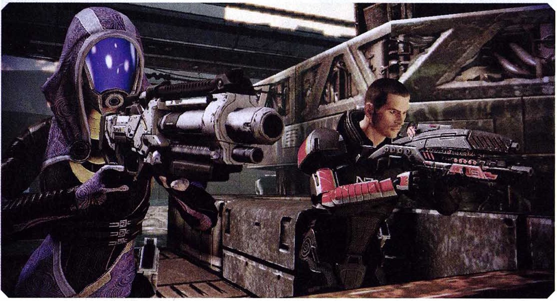
URDNOT WREX
The Lt. Commander Worf of krogans. Respect him or get out of his way.



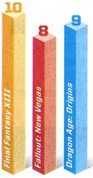
Ammo powers give Shepard and crew an edge in battle. Incendiary ammo works best against organic targets, while disruptor ammo fries synthetics' circuitry.



The Dark Horse comic that opens the game quickly catches first timers up on the story, but feels a bit empty.



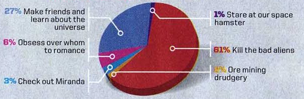
teammates. Assessing the battlefield and forming a plan of attack is the way to go—it's not just about taking cover and popping up here and there to fire off a few rounds and then wait for Shepard's health to regenerate. If an enemy has a particularly nasty flamethrower, for example, our engineer can use the Overload ability to make it backfire and explode. Engineers can also disable enemy shields so that our biotic adepts and soldiers can hit them hard. If we're outnumbered, a biotic can unleash a shockwave to swat away enemies, doing damage and buying time to regroup.



ScorePole

Mass Effect 2 sits comfortably alongside the PS3's other top-tier role-playing games.

What we did in... Mass Effect 2



Two crewmembers accompany Shepard on each mission, and letting the A.I. characters do their own thing works well (seriously, no annoying A.I. here whatsoever), but since we're control freaks, we tended to give our partners a bit of direction by bringing up the powers wheel and telling each character who to target and what power to use. Choosing diverse party members to allow for any battle condition is certainly important, but the personality of the individual characters factored in our choices, too. Garrus, for example, has so many great one-liners and quips for every situation that we brought him along just for the company, even though his powers overlapped with our Shepard's.

Novel Approach

The Dark Horse interactive graphic novel at the beginning of the game does a solid job of concisely catching up newcomers with the major plot points of the first *Mass Effect* game and allows players to make the same high-level decisions that affect aspects of the sequel. The *Mass Effect* experience is so much more than the sum of its plot points, though, and despite the slick art and voiceover, the comic is like reading a Wikipedia page—it conveys the facts but doesn't impart the true feel. Skipping the original means players won't feel an immediate connection to the returning cast, but at least they're easy to grow to love and *Effect 2* still presents its own self-contained story.

The real beauty here, though, is that *Effect 2* doesn't compromise between narrative and gameplay—both are equally strong. Despite its ambitious hodgepodge of elements, everything feels polished. Sure, there are some annoying missteps—like the planet mining minigame where players tediously hover a cursor over every planet in the galaxy searching for minerals to upgrade gear—but even that has been streamlined and improved for the PS3 version.

Effect 2 has touched a place in our hearts few other games have. Despite the abundance of science fiction-themed games available today, none has rivaled the depth of a classic sci-fi book the way this does. For fans of sci-fi in general, this is a huge deal. Its universe—full of distinct alien races steeped in political history—is fully realized in a way that makes us want to immerse ourselves until we learn every facet and detail. (In other words: *tons* of replay value.) And as thrilled as we are to finally begin this journey on PS3, we're just as excited to see where it goes from here. CAROLYN GUDMUNDSON

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Those darn British powe outlets. Always glowing ominously and stuff.

GOLD AWARD PlayStation The Official Magazine

LittleBigPlanet 2

Bigger than we ever dreamed possible

Info

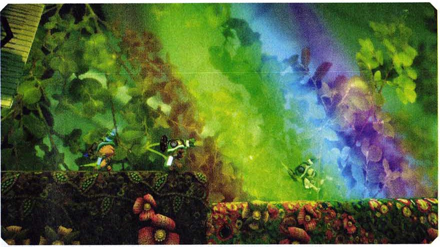
Format PS3
Pub SCEA
Dev Media Molecule
Price $59.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like the first *LittleBigPlanet* took a programming course.

Think back to grade school for a second. As a learning environment, it's clearly structured with straightforward tasks and uncomplicated goals. It's a place meant to teach the basics, but basics only go so far. That's the first *LittleBigPlanet:* a robust but ultimately simple set of tools that weren't too difficult to comprehend and that could be used to create some pretty impressive things. But for the more ambitious imaginations of those interested in creating something closer to a "real" game, the original game's toolset has gotten just a little *too* simple.

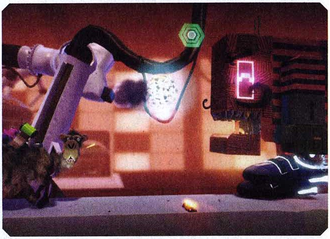
LittleBigPlanet 2, then, is more like high school. There's less handholding and tons of more complicated stuff to learn, which can seem intimidating and even overwhelming at first. However, with experimentation and perseverance, it's possible to create things here that the first *LBP* could only *hint* at. It's a big step forward for the franchise, but like before, what comes out of it depends largely on what players want to put in.

Brave New (Craft)world

That's not to say *LBP2* is merely a game-construction kit. Like its predecessors, it doesn't *force* creativity; instead it starts off with a story mode for up to four players composed of themed platforming levels and smartly constructed minigames (the latter unlocked by uncovering secrets in the former). The biggest departure from the first *LBP* is that there's an *actual story* this time, complete with cutscenes and almost-fully voiced secondary characters: A giant, terrifying space monster called



The Sackworld is as cute and endearing as ever, but the science behind it has grown so much more powerful and sophisticated.



We were contastly tempted to scream "It's alive! It's alive!" during the creation process.

> "It's possible to create things the first *LBP* could only hint at."

the Negativitron is corrupting and destroying the imagination-fueled Craftworld, leaving it up to Sackboy (or Sackgirl or Sackpersons) to set things right.

This, like the previous *LBP*, mostly involves a lot of jumping and item collecting, along with frequent environmental puzzles, run-ins with monsters, and other lethal hazards. Getting past these now takes more than just Sackboy's modest floaty-jumping and object-grasping skills—it also takes power-ups, like a swingy grappling hook, gloves that let him carry and throw things, and the Creatinator, an absurdly fun, free-aiming cannon-helmet that can be rigged to shoot pretty much anything (but that tends to be confined to water and flying cakes in story mode). There are also vehicles, which are now fully controllable and can fly, jump, shoot, or roll.

In addition to Sackboy's new arsenal and sense of purpose, the story mode features a ton of unique side-levels and minigames, most of which are meant to be multiplayer competitions. It's also an introduction to things new to *LBP*, like vertically scrolling flight sequences and top-down levels. Their numbers are sparse, but the upshot is that players who aren't satisfied with what's provided can create as many offshoots as they want.

Make It So

As any *LBP* fan knows, the real substance of the game isn't in the prefab levels—it's in creating new ones. This is where *LBP2* really shines. There's a lot of really cool new stuff, not the least of which is the ability to create levels that don't hew to *LBP's* side-scrolling platform gameplay in the slightest. When we were first shown some of the things players can create in *LBP2*, for example, the demos largely focused on supposedly new 3D and top-down level types. These were pretty impressive, but as it turns out, they're really just perspective tricks enabled by the *real* addition: a startlingly wide array of tiny, functionality-enabling switches and sensors.

These can be slapped like stickers onto objects, characters, or the world itself (or hidden inside "microchips," which can then be, in turn, stored within *other* microchips). Once attached, players are free to tinker with them, enabling objects (or even the level itself) to do anything from

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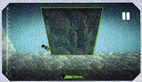
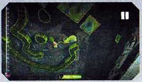
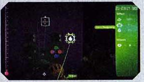
Not So Tough Top-down level creation in five simple steps



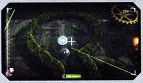
THE FLOOR
Start by creating a flat backdrop against the back layer. Simple enough to do, eh? Even we can handle this one.



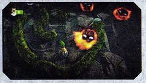
THE WALLS
Glue objects to the backdrop to make it appear more three-dimensional, and make sure to enclose the level to preserve the illusion.



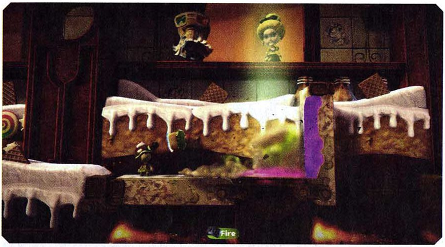
THE RIDE
Create a small vehicle for Sackboy with an anti-gravity circuit set to 100 percent. Be sure to trick it out with attacks and abilities.



THE CAMERA
Leave it alone, or set it to a low angle for a more "looming" effect. Screw this up and lose the right to critcize camera views in other games.



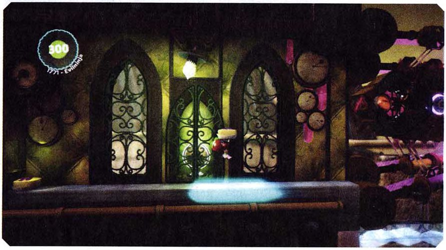
THE OBJECTIVE
Populate the level with enemies, goals, and interactive playthings. It's not a side-scroller anymore! See? Now wasn't that simple?

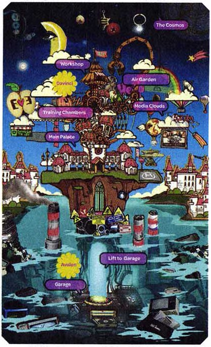


▲ Larry Da Vinci (seen at the top) is no where near as brilliant as his namesake. But he does help make *LBP2's* story campaign a thoroughly entertaining affair.

REJECT THE PAST

▼ We're counting down the days until someone makes an awesome Sackboy pinball machine.





triggering a specific sound when things bang against each other to defying the laws of physics entirely.

This is where things get complicated. Learning how some of these new functions work on their own can be daunting enough, but figuring out how to make them work together as complex logic circuits can be downright mind-boggling especially for the inexperienced. How much gravity resistance is the right amount, really? What's the best way to make something move around freely underwater without it sinking, or worse, flying up past the surface? Taking apart some of the pre-made items can help show the way, but even those can seem ridiculously complicated at first.

Robot F(r)iends!

Our advice? Start small and simple, experiment, and don't feel pressured to create a full level right off the bat. And above all, remember that all these new tools are there to serve the creative process—not direct it.

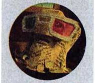
Then there are the Sackbots. Another hugely significant addition, these semi-autonomous robots can be resized, redecorated, and used as enemies, friends, background objects, pilotable vehicles, or "actors" that carry out actions pre-recorded by player-creators (including voice messages). Pre-recorded or no, it's possible for Sackbots to do anything players can—right down to using power-ups and vehicles—and more with the help of slapped-on microchips. Whatever uses creators find for them, they're much more versatile and interesting than the comparatively simple idiot creatures that could be made in the first game.

Speaking of which, all of the old devices are still here—the pistons, the winches, the creature brains, and the giant switches—but they're less important now since the new logic circuits can perform many of the same functions. It's now possible, for instance, to program entire behavioral routines into simple objects, enabling them to move, attack, and even float on their own. It's also possible to put just about anything under direct player control by slapping on a control seat and wiring the right functions to the right buttons.

The new flying vehicles, for example? They've got a lot of cool bells and whistles attached, but at their core

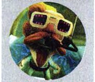
Cast List

THE MENTOR



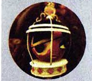
Larry Da Vinci
Bumbling Renaissance man with a cardboard beard.

THE SCIENTIST



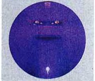
Avalon Centrifuge
Egomaniacal self-proclaimed inventor of science.

THE PSYCHIATRIST

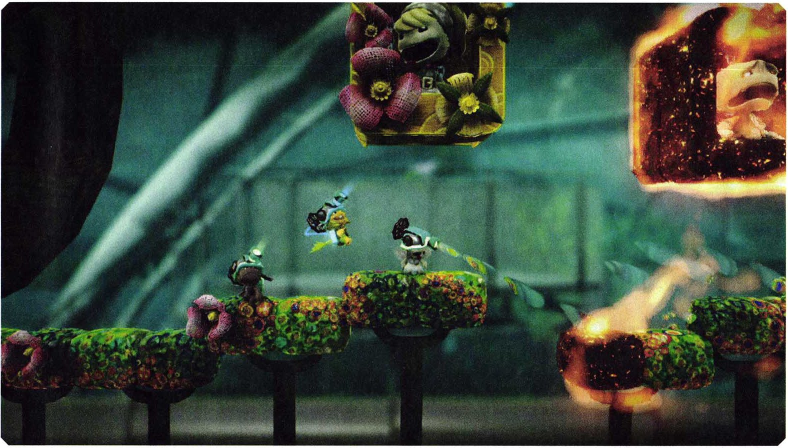


Eve Silva Paragorica
One-eyed apple who holds the key to salvation.

THE VILLIAN



Negativitron
Giant, dragon-like cosmic entity who likes a good cackle.



▲ **These news helmets are as adorable as they are functional. Just one of the many new objects that make *LBP2* a world of such immense wonder and possibility.**

they're just normal objects with a control seat and a modifier that lets them defy gravity. This is also how the "top-down" bits are made: Just tilt the camera a particular way and make a vertical-facing vehicle on which gravity has no effect, and suddenly the backdrop is a freely explorable "floor" (see sidebar). Simple 3D effects, meanwhile, can be achieved using a background animated with enemy objects (preferably made from the new, intangible "holographic" building material) programmed to grow larger as they get closer to the player.

Sackboy Mind Trick

Figuring out how to do all that stuff takes a little ingenuity, however, and the game's tutorials—while numerous and long—don't cover *every* new addition, leaving it up to players to piece together how best to create things like animated backgrounds, laser blasts, and onscreen health bars. Of course, that's where one of *LBP's* biggest assets—its massive community of content-sharing creators—comes in. With thousands of tinkerers at work, we expect amazing things will be achieved in no time. (In the beta, for example, someone's already made a rudimentary clone of classic first-person shooter *Wolfenstein 3D.)*

And that's the bottom line with *LittleBigPlanet 2:* Buying the game is buying into its potential. Its prefabricated campaign is fun enough—especially with four players—but experimenting with its Create mode is hugely addictive, and imaginative players will find themselves sucked in for hours on end. Those who don't want to create, meanwhile, will still be able to sample an endless stream of new community content. And assuming *LBP2* catches on like the last one did, that's a big win for everyone. **MIKEL REPARAZ**

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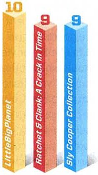
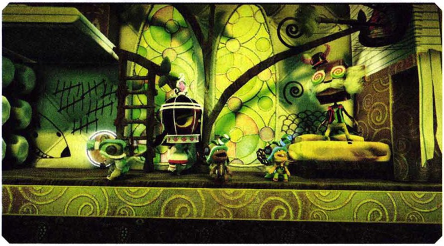
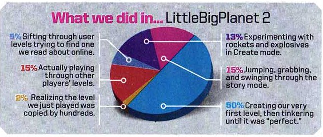
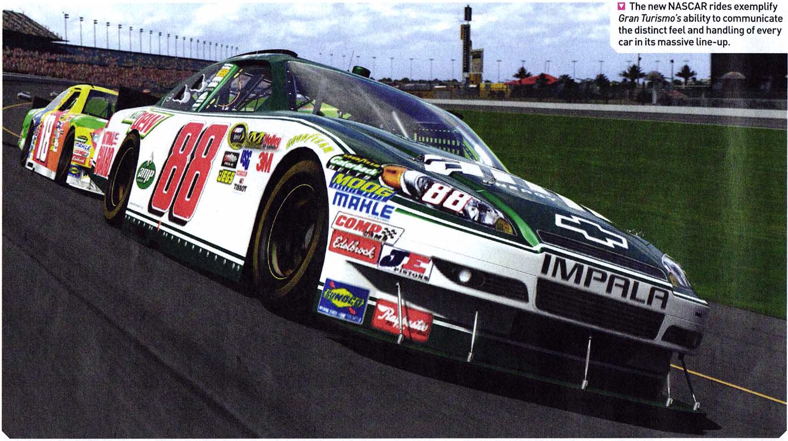


ScorePole
Though the others are better when it comes to pure platforming, *LBP* offers so much more.




What we did in... LittleBigPlanet 2
5% Sifting through user levels trying to find one we read about online.
15% Actually playing through other players' levels.
2% Realizing the level we just played was copied by hundreds.
13% Experimenting with rockets and explosives in Create mode.
15% Jumping, grabbing, and swinging through the story mode.
50% Creating our very first level, then tinkering until it was "perfect."



The new NASCAR rides exemplify *Gran Turismo's* ability to communicate the distinct feel and handling of every car in its massive line-up.

Gran Turismo 5

Bigger but not necessarily better

No other driving game communicates the intricate edge-of-adhesion dance as well as *Gran Turismo 5*. A Honda Fit attacking the corkscrew at Laguna Seca may not be as exhilarating as a Ferrari F40, but there is a subtle but tangible set of inputs required for each vehicle to navigate the turn at its maximum capability. It's as much art as it is science and it's the heart of what makes *Gran Turismo* great.

And if that interplay between acceleration and braking is *GT5's* powertrain, its high-def graphics is the gorgeous sheet metal. Running at 60 frames-per-second and 1080p resolution, *GT5* remains a showcase title to show off the PS3's prowess to family and friends. But this is also where the road gets bumpy: Only Premium car models receive a detailed interior, the ability to display damage, and uber-detailed exterior treatments, and they only comprise about 20 percent of *GT5's* 1,031 cars. We could forgive the Standard models' loss of interior view and damage modeling, but there's a noticeable qualitative difference in exterior appearance. Couple in a preponderance of jaggies on car seam lines, instances of screen tearing, and bad pixelization problems when cars drive through particle clouds (snow, smoke, or rain) and frankly, we were shocked

Info

Format PS3
Pub SCEA
Dev Polyphony Digital
Price $59.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like the new car smell is finally wearing off.

5 of 1,031 The most ridiculous rides in GT5

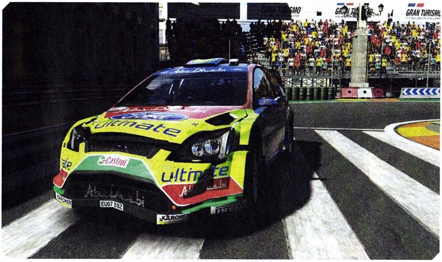
2003 JAY LENO TANK CAR
It has a 1600hp tank engine and the *Titanic's* turn radius.

2003 HONDA ODYSSEY
Sure, it handles nice for a minivan. But it's a *minivan*.

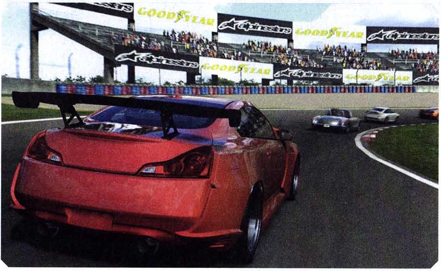
2002 TOYOTA PRIUS G
Looks like a Corolla so you don't even get the Green cred.

1942 VW SCHWIMMWAGEN
Those silly Germans—they're prepared for anything.

1988 VOLVO 240 GLT ESTATE
Suddenly, that minivan doesn't seem all that bad.



Damage deformation is...okay, but is limited to Premium car models and doesn't significantly impact or enhance the actual race experience.



Five years in the making, *GT5* comes packed with content but *still* feels like a work in progress.

by how the game alternated between looking great and looking flawed.

GT5 comes loaded with new options and features including the Spec B manager mode that allows the creation and development of up to six drivers, special racing events (where the NASCAR and *Top Gear* elements are most prominently integrated), and a race-course maker. The special events displayed some personality and flair and were the most fulfilling new addition, but we failed to find any charm in Spec B, where we spent most of our time simply instructing our driver to speed up or slow down. And forget any notions of *ModNation*-levels of customization in the course maker; it only allows modifications to the game's existing tracks.

But it's *GT5's* online multiplayer that most epitomizes its maddening confluence of excellence and mediocrity. Get into an online race and the gameplay performance is exemplary, but finding a thoughtfully structured race with engaging and challenging competition can be a nightmare. The problem isn't as pronounced for hardcore *GT* players with garages filled with high-end rides, but we pity noobs and casual racers who might drive in with a Fiat 500 to face off against a Bugatti Veyron.

Make no mistake about it: *GT5* is the best *Gran Turismo* game ever made—but *sooo* much of it is enhanced, but reconstituted, content from previous games. Those prepared to take an extended road trip will still discover *GT's* true delights, but it's sublime depth and gameplay may be lost on those seeking a short test drive. We still love this ride, but it is telling that even longtime fans like us are beginning to wonder how many miles our baby has left in her. **ROGER BURCHILL**

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Gran Accessories

Logitech Driving Force GT

$149.99
logitech.com

GT5's integration of the Driving Force GT wheel in its Options menu made setup a breeze. We love the wheel's integration of standard DualShock controls and its adjustment dial allows for real-time control over a number of car settings. We do wish the mounting clamps could accommodate thicker surfaces though. ⑧

Logitech G27 Racing Wheel

$299.99
logitech.com

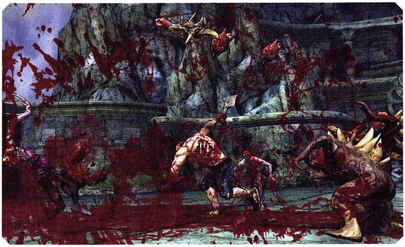
The top-of-the-line G27 offers more refined force feedback, a six-speed shifter, metal pedals including one for the clutch, and niceties like real leather. It's more expensive and not currently integrated into *GT5's* Options menu, but offers the ultimate in performance and feel for the discerning hardcore racing enthusiast. ⑨

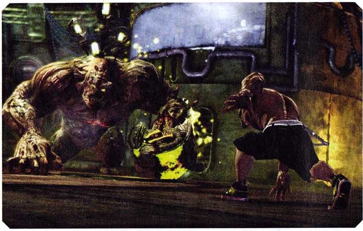
This is how we roll

Playseat GT5 edition

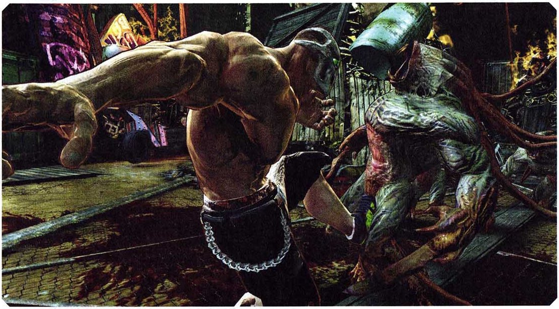
$599.99 | playseatamerica.com

Hopping into the Playseat was a revelation: Suddenly, the steering wheel was always in an optimal position and the pedals no longer slid away from us. The few niggles: Integrating the G27's shifter requires the purchase of an optional clamp, and the heady price tag had us wishing for a financing option, but there's no question as to the Playseat's quality and robust construction. ⑧





There's never been a blood-and-gore infested videogame that had us wishing for a negotiated settlement—until *Splatterhouse.*



We can admire Rick's intentions, but we're betting he still creeps Jennifer out.

Splatterhouse

Don't get splashed by this bloody, horrible mess

Info

PS3
SPLATTERHOUSE
M
namco

Format PS3
Pub Namco Bandai
Dev Namco Bandai
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like the house that crapped blood.

There has always been much ado about violent games and their alleged effects on impressionable young minds. The reworked/reimagined *Splatterhouse* takes this to a whole new level with abundant violence, gore, and sexual themes, but the real concern for parents should be the waste of money and excessive crying they will have to endure if their kids get a hold of this game and realize just how bad it is.

Splatterhouse's core game design is an old school beat-'em-up, and not a very good one at that. The game's gore-gimmick presentation is all the more obvious and insulting when enduring muddy controls that feel like guiding the Incredible Hulk through a pool of pea soup and an insipid storyline that could make *Evil Dead 2* seem Shakespearian.

As in the arcade original, we once again assume the role of Rick, a young man looking to propose to his unlucky girlfriend Jennifer. Jennifer is kidnapped by the evil Dr. West and Rick is injured in the process; with a mixture of themes from such works as *The Mask* and *Spawn,* Rick places a soul-sucking mask on his face and is transformed into a hulking brute traversing the doctor's mansion and painting the place red with the blood of his evil followers...one room at a time. Rinse, crush heads, repeat.

There really is nothing else to this game. The visuals are nominal. The textures and animations do their job well enough, but the sound effects and music are annoying. The repeated, ethereal orders from the "demon" that gave Rick the mask quickly become irritating and the scathing metal guitar-solo soundtrack simply serves to make the aural presentation a great big rat's nest of nasty.

The game breaks several tried-and-true gaming rules, and breaks them proudly as players mash buttons and hope for the best. Off-screen enemies tear Rick to shreds, imprecise controls turn the gameplay into a frenzy of prediction, and a few platforming sequences result in abrupt, instant death (with yawn-inducing post-death load times). Pepper this sheer delight with repetitive quick-time kills and there's the makings of a thrown controller... that will likely be found broken on the neighbor's lawn.

Everything about this game seems to be a loud, obnoxious effort to suck out the fun with a bloody straw made from an empty sausage casing. *Splatterhouse* could not have been less fun if the game disc shipped with razor-sharp edges. **RUSS GARBUTT**

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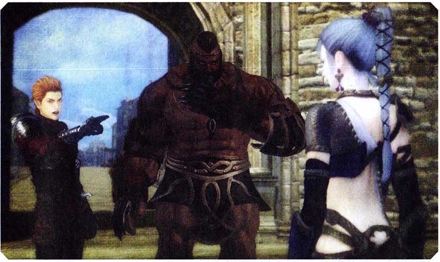
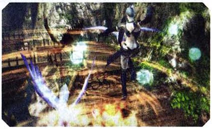


Trinity
Souls of Zill O'll

A wizard, warrior, and an assassin walk into a bar...

Even a Prinny-adoring, cosplaying otaku could be forgiven for never having heard of *Trinity: Souls of Zill O'll*. Although it's appeared on the PSone, PS2, and PSP in Japan, this is the first time *Dynasty Warriors* developer Omega Force's action-RPG series has landed stateside. The game won't be familiar to most, but the buttonmashy gameplay should appeal to anyone who's looted and leveled his way through other action-focused JRPGs. In addition to hack-'n'-slash combat, the fantasy-themed narrative—complete with an evil king hell bent on conquering, well, *everything*—should be second nature to gamers who've ever saved a kingdom with a big blade and stuffed sack of magic spells.

That's not to say all the familiar-feeling content is a bad thing. On the contrary, for those who dig busting open treasure chests, collecting orbs, and battling hordes of horned, winged, fanged, and clawed beasts, *Trinity* serves up a satisfying 20-plus hours of action-RPG fare. It also has a hook in its trio of playable protagonists: Not long into the adventure, the half-elf hero teams with a fists-of-stone bruiser and a blade-flinging lady fighter; players can effortlessly switch among the three on the fly, utilizing their expansive skill sets as needed. This means, for example, the wizard can freeze a pack of dire wolves, then turn things over to the big warrior dude for a little fist-fueled ice breaking. From shuffling among characters to equipping and upgrading their weapons and powers, the system works well. Additionally, the brimming roster of baddies—nicely catalogued in a bestiary—ensure players will need to utilize each of their evolving abilities in order to progress.



▲ A blade-flinging babe always trumps a half-elf hero or a hulking bruiser in our book.

PS3
TRINITY

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Tecmo KOEI
Dev Omega Force **Price** $59.99
ESRB Teen **It's like** comfort food for famished JRPG fanatics.

Cutting a swath through the expected environments—dungeons, forests, swamps—makes good sense, but be careful when attempting to follow the tediously spun story. The lengthy cutscenes are tolerable, but the static backdrops, overlaid with talking-head text, are painful; many interactions and encounters (such as entering shops and taverns) are handled this way, siphoning some fun from the otherwise thumb-blistering action. For those who don't mind slogging through the story, though, there's plenty of comfortably familiar adventuring in *Trinity*. **MATT CABRAL**

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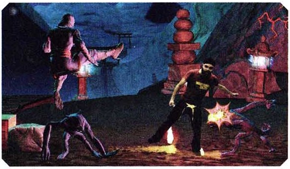
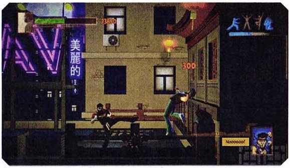


▲ The path to victory heads far away from *Kung-Fu Live.*



Kung-Fu Live

About as fun as a swift kick to the crotch

Info

Format PSN
Pub Virtual Air Guitar
Dev Virtual Air Guitar
Price $14.99
ESRB Teen
It's like a martial art built on shame and disgrace.

A novel concept can carry a game only so far. Unfortunately for *Kung-Fu Live*, it's the execution rather than the idea that matters. The PS Eye-centric sidescroller has interesting ambitions: physically clobber chumps in a beat-'em-up parody of a kung-fu flick. Sounds rad on paper, but it's all downhill from there.

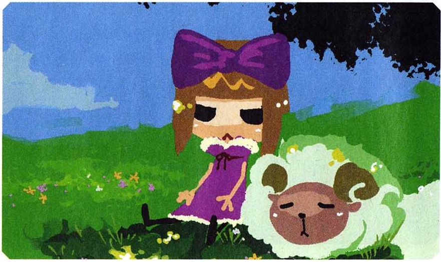
Setting up for *Kung-Fu Live* is an inconvenience comparable to a car breaking down in the desert. It's tiresome, boring, and everyone just wants to go home. Without the perfect lighting and clothing, punches and kicks go undetected (or misinterpreted). Oh, and considerably more space is needed than *Live* indicates; we could park a truck in our game space and it still wasn't enough room.

Once we'd got as close as we could to play-area perfection and actually started interacting with the game, it wasn't long before we realized that *Live* is simply a bland and uninspired brawler with nothing to offer. Waves of mentally challenged morons patiently await, but the game's broken hit-detection just seals the deal: This is a worthless waste of time and hard drive space. That it costs money is criminal. **MITCH DYER**

PlayStation The Official Magazine **2**

Beat Sketcher

Doodling on the downbeat



Info

Format PSN
Pub SCEA
Dev Japan Studio/ Noisy Croak
Price $9.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like scribbling in Paint while blaring synth-pop.

As its succinctly descriptive title indicates, *Beat Sketcher* carefully straddles the line between a drawing app and music game, pairing Move-enabled doodles with the dulcet tones of synthesized instruments. Its digital artistry comes in a few distinct flavors: drawing step-by-step images (like a dolphin or fire engine) to the tempo of a song, playing brief minigames, or free sketching over a reflected PS Eye image—with or without a coloring book-like onscreen overlay.

It's a clever idea that delivers occasional bouts of amusement, but any winning moments are mostly self-made. With just a dozen guided drawing challenges, most of the enjoyment stems from the freeform Creation mode. Players can select variables like brush size and color, and even manually choose instrument sounds, but it rarely feels like more than an interesting diversion.

Even the four-player games (played with one shared Move controller) lack enthusiasm, but *Beat Sketcher* remains a solid download for kids and families seeking a low-impact outlet for creativity.

PlayStation **6**

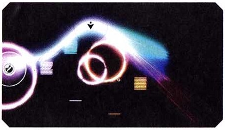
ANDREW HAYWARD

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1

Format **PS3** Pub **EA** Dev **EA Bright Light** ESRB **Teen**

Harry Potter leaves Hogwarts to battle Death Eaters and Dementors as he seeks to destroy Voldemort's Horcruxes. Harry's all grown up—and so is his game, which has evolved from cutesy adventuring into a wand-based shooter. Sounds exciting, but the thumb-numbing repetitiveness kills any thrills. Arbitrary side quests add length to the game, but they don't make sense and only serve to highlight the lack of gameplay variety. **ANNE LEWIS**

PlayStation **4**



Auditorium HD

Format **PSN** Pub **Zoo Games** Dev **Cipher Prime**
ESRB **Everyone**

Consider *Auditorium HD* an artsy palate cleanser for those quiet moments between gore-splattering shredfests. The music puzzler involves manipulating and bending light beams into audio containers until soothing orchestral symphonies are revealed. The task initially seems simplistic, but the complexity and challenge ramps up as the game progresses. This version offers all 72 levels from the original PC indie title and 78 all-new levels, as well as superfluous Move and 3D support. It's an acquired taste, but there is a soothing appeal to what's playing in this *Auditorium*. **ROGER BURCHILL**

PlayStation **7**

Spelunker HD

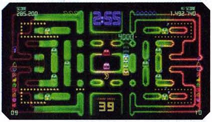
Format **PS3** Pub **Tozai Games** Dev **Irem Software**
ESRB **Everyone**

Heroes shouldn't be so fragile that a speck of dust can kill them. While that may sound like an exaggeration, it's exactly the case in *Spelunker HD*. Based on the 8-bit "classic," this revamped platformer had us running and jumping through caves in search of treasure. But with a limited air supply and a slew of deadly obstacles, it's an arduous challenge where death comes way too easily and often. Climb a rope, touch a wall, or jump a tiny gap wrong and we're dead. Some might argue that it's just extreme difficulty, but bad game design is bad game design and there's no reason to leave it intact in a remake. **NATHAN MEUNIER**

PlayStation **2**

Pac-Man Championship Edition DX

Format **PS3** Pub **Namco Bandai** Dev **Namco Bandai** ESRB **Everyone**

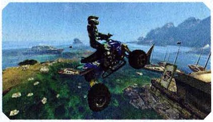


Seconds into *Pac-Man: Championship Edition DX*, it was clear that we were going to be consumed by this arcade reboot. It's amazing how a few subtle updates amped-up the adrenaline factor. Like the original, the hungry protagonist zips through corridors to gobble up dots and avoid ghosts in pursuit. But these spirits now lie dormant, only awakening when Pac-Man passes by to transform them into a frenzied conga-line. Nabbing a power pill to help ourselves to a full-course spectral meal is more rewarding than ever, while piling on the score also speeds up gameplay—so the more we ate, the crazier the pursuits. This is retro homage done right. **NATHAN MEUNIER**

PlayStation **9**

Nail’d

Format **PS3** Pub **Deep Silver** Dev **Techland** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

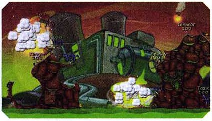


Physics-defying jumps, turns, and—strangely—an inordinate number of blimps take this over-the-top racer to the next level. *Nail’d* may ignore gravity, but it has no problem reminding us that driving through water and mud will cloud our screens with gunk. The vision hazards, coupled with the occasional respawn from flying through the air into a rock, are among the few minor complaints. In good ol' arcade racer fashion, we can customize rides and riders according to our perferred specs to compete in a quick race or a full-blown tournament. There's no genre ground broken here, but *Nail’d* is fast fun for fans of ridiculous racing. **ANNE LEWIS**

PlayStation **7**

Worms Battle Islands

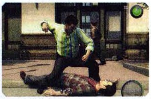
Format **PSP** Pub **Team17 Software** Dev **Team17 Software** ESRB **Everyone 10+**



It's the small touches that make a difference in *Worms: Battle Islands:* New stages to blow the snot out of, a tactics mode for dealing damage before the fighting even begins, and scores of unlockables round out this portable package. Opposing worm armies deploy along a fully destructible landscape, manuevering and firing off outlandish weaponry in hopes of obliterating enemy troops. While the familiar array of armaments doesn't buck the series' bizarre status quo, the awesome new weapon factory can concoct even crazier combinations. Engaging local and online multiplayer match options also bolster the solid solo modes. **NATHAN MEUNIER**

PlayStation **8**

DLC Roundup

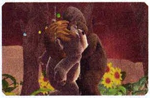


Mafia II

Joe's Adventures

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Mature**

Featuring story-missions that revolve around Joe Bararo's exploits during Vito's incarceration, Joe's Adventures is action-packed with intense shootouts in unique locales like a supermarket and a brothel. Optional side-quests also have Joe running-and-gunning throughout Empire Bay.



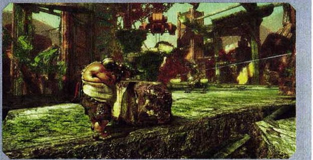
Naughty Bear

Ep. 10: The Vampiricorn

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Teen**

The bat-vomiting, stuffing-sucking Vampiricorn is stealing Naughty Bear's killing thunder, so brutally slicing the stuffing out of cuddly bear neighbors takes a backseat to dealing with problems of the undead variety in this latest episode. New multiplayer modes add to the fun.

Download of the Month

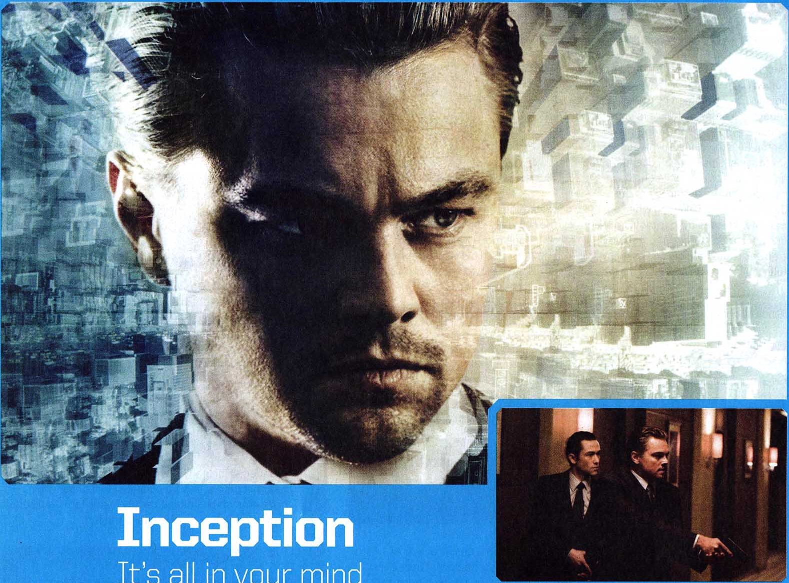


Enslaved: Odyssey to the West

Pigsy's Perfect 10

Price $9.99 **ESRB** Teen

The odyssey just keeps getting odder: Lonely and in need of companionship, Pigsy heads out into the towering piles of garbage to hunt down the parts to build a new robotic pal. The corpulent co-star becomes embroiled in heaps of trouble during this story-driven side-adventure that features ample servings of grappling and gadgetry.



Inception

It's all in your mind

Info

Price $35.99
Creators Christopher Nolan
Starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Ellen Page
Rated PG-13
Extras Behind-the-scenes materials, documentaries, DTS HD 5.1 soundtrack, BD-Live supplements, galleries, trailers.

Christopher Nolan's work has always focused heavily on the internal battles of his characters, playing on the concepts of reality, motives, and emotions with an amazingly deft hand and intelligent insight. *Inception* fits Nolan's style well, but amps up his skills as an action director to an unprecedented level. It's easy to say that *Inception* builds on the visuals of *The Matrix,* since the trippy, hyperactive action sequences are similar. But it's also not a stretch to say that Nolan's dreamscape set-pieces allow some of the coolest and most ingenious action sequences since *The Matrix* trilogy.

Inception is a heist movie that just happens to focus on stealing information from the subconscious mind, allowing Nolan to mix together scenes that would otherwise make little sense. The layer-upon-layer nature of the movie gives viewers an incredibly surreal, pseudo-intellectual sci-fi experience that somehow manages to remain largely coherent throughout the film.

Beyond the stunning visuals and action sequences, the cast is equally great. While Leonardo DiCaprio is the obvious headline, Joseph Gordon-Levitt really deserves props for his portrayal of a guy who—no matter how crazy the dream around him gets—always treats every situation like another day at the office. He's brilliant here, and his acrobatic stylings will hopefully land him a superhero role any day now.

As great as *Inception* is, however, the story never quite gels as well as movies like *Memento* and *The Prestige.* Both of those movies offered a less action-heavy, yet more intense roller coaster ride with endings that were both profound and disturbing. *Inception's* ending is more like a personality test, leaving viewers to guess what the movie's point was—or, whether there was even a point at all.

While many viewers will enjoy this, leaving the characters' ultimate fate to speculation seems like an easy way out of a story that struggles to be a lot more intellectual than it actually is. Either way, the movie is still one of the most engagingly creative sci-fi action flicks in some time. *Inception's* Blu-ray release also packs in a superb HD presentation and a solid bulk of extras that provide insight into how the movie was made—with a particular focus on the crazy, mind-bending action sequences. **JASON D'APRILE**

PlayStation
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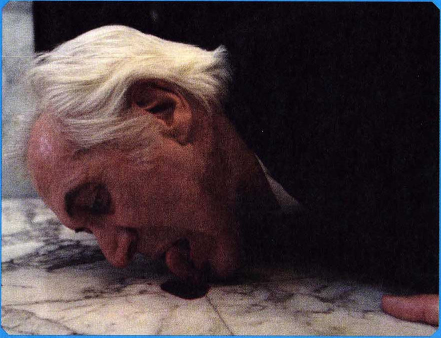
8



Cronos

A horror master's first headtrip

Along with Christopher Nolan, Guillermo del Toro is easily one of the best directors of our generation. So, we're excited that Criterion has released del Toro's first feature-length film, *Cronos*, on Blu-ray. Del Toro helped oversee the movie's transfer and while the 1993 Mexican film isn't as sharp and high tech as modern horror flicks, it still looks beautiful on BD.

In this original take on the vampire mythos, it's easy to see the burgeoning roots of the horror, fantasy, family, and child endangerment elements that del Toro uses to such good effect in his later work. The story centers around Jesus, an elderly antiques shop owner who finds a mysterious device that grants immortality with (of course) a heavy price attached. Hot in pursuit of the device is a terminally ill American who uses his thuggish cousin (played hilariously well by Ron Perlman) to do his dirty work.

Far from a comic-bookish special-effects extravaganza, *Cronos* is—like del Toro's other Spanish-language films—darker, moodier, and more methodical than his amazingly fun U.S. endeavors. The pacing is much slower and the movie is a far cry from today's angst-ridden, insufferable teen vamp prattle. While Jesus' granddaughter isn't the central character, del Toro's tendency to show horrific adult-created situations through the eyes of a child remains central to the narration.

The director's insightful, personal details of filming the movie makes his commentary track a great listen as well. Criterion hasn't included a ton of extras, but there's still plenty of good stuff here. Aside from the two excellent commentary tracks, there's an early short film from the director, cast and crew interviews, a booklet, and an art gallery.

Fans of del Toro's Spanish movies, *The Devil's Backbone*, and *Pan's Labyrinth* will especially love *Cronos*. It's an insightful and entertaining take on a now-overdone genre that twists familiar elements into something that—almost two decades later—still feels fresh and distinctive. JD

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Info

Price $39.95 **Creator** Guillermo del Toro **Starring** Federico Luppi, Ron Perlman, Claudio Brook **Rated** R **Extras** Commentary, *Geometria* short, tour of del Toro's odd house.

Blu-ray Roundup

Devil

Price $39.98 **Rated** PG-13

Devil feels like an overlong episode of *The Twilight Zone* or *The Outer Limits*, if not a particularly good one. It's a simple horror flick about five people stuck in an elevator—one of whom is the devil. *Devil* is ably directed, but predictable and not particularly scary. It is at least watchable, which makes it better than most M. Night Shyamalan movies. 6

The Tournament

Price $19.97 **Rated** R

A good take on the Most Dangerous Game Show genre, *The Tournament* works because of its three leads—Ving Rhames, Kelly Hu, and Robert Carlyle. The action starts out great, with Hu in some terrific hand-to-hand fights, but has trouble keeping momentum. 6

Avatar
Special Edition

Price $59.99 **Rated** PG-13

Avatar makes a great Blu-ray demo disc. Now on a three-disc set with tons of extras, this is the release to buy. There is about 15 minutes of new footage but, unfortunately, the film is still saddled with a mediocre script, one-dimensional characters, and ponderous sense of morality. 6

The Expendables

Price $39.99 **Rated** R

Stallone's love letter to '80s action movies is an often hilarious testosterone fest. When the film's in full-blown action mode, it's terrific. Sadly, *The Expendables* gets bogged down by touchy-feely pseudo-philosophy too often. 7

Want that

Lust-have stuff for PlayStation people

Dyson City

The company's smallest non-handheld vac, the Dyson City weighs a paltry 12 lbs. Within its small frame resides a surprising amount of powerful suck, and the superb design means it will sit pretty right next to the PS3 Slim.

$399

dyson.com

XPAND Universal 3D Glasses

These battery-powered specs can be used with any 3D television set on the market, as well as in XpanD movie theaters around the country.

$129

xpandcinema.com

NOX Audio Scout

When we want a bass punch, we need buds with a tight seal in our ears, and Scout's silicone eartips deliver in spades with 6mm Balanced Armature drivers.

$80

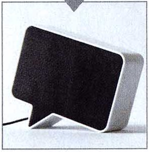
nox-audio.com

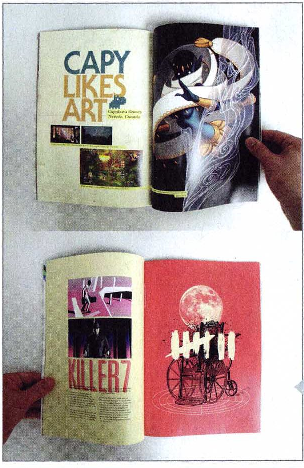
Art Lebedev Studios Speak-er

From the fantastic studio "the." comes the iconic Speak-er, a metaphor turned physical in the best way possible: desk speakers shaped like speech bubbles.

$99 per pair

thinkofthe.com



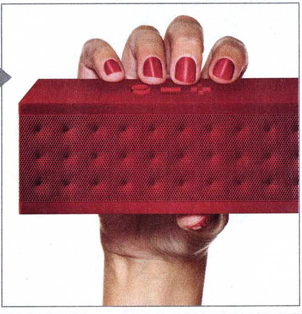


Jawbone Jambox

The Jambox's sheer aural punch is surprising, with enough bass and clarity to make it a serious portable boombox. Stream music to the device over Bluetooth or use it as a speakerphone.

$199

jawbone.com



EXP. Video Game Art & Culture

Designer Cory Schmitz's book is a full 90 pages of visual gaming bliss, ranging from a pixilated Kratos to modern reinterpretations of *Ico* and *Katamari Damacy*.

$35

attractmo.de/shop

COMIC HEROES

THE MAGAZINE ALL COMICS FANS HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR...

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"I'M RIDING THE SU

ALAN MOOR COMIC

EXCLUS

3 COV TO COL

Which one hav

GREEN LANTERN/ GREEN ARROW

Their classic '70s road trip revisited

DEVIL INSIDE

Mike Mignola talks all things Hellboy

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PS3
PSP
PlayStation 2
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
MORTAL KOMBAT IS BACK!
Watch out! Here comes the
HUGEST GAMES OF 2011
Twisted Metal | Crysis 2
Metal Gear Solid | Deus Ex
Batman: Arkham City | Rage
ASSASSIN'S CREED BLACK
KILLZONE 3

Kratos does *Kombat*, we toured *Turismo*, and blew up the New Year with PlayStation's top 11.

X-What?

I'm new to *PlayStation: The Official Magazine*, and PlayStation in general, but something I immediately noticed when I read your magazine is the fact that you guys mention competing platforms and companies, whereas other "exclusive" magazines hold their tongue about other systems as if uttering their name would send them to hell. I really respect that.

LIAM O'KEEFE PARTS UNKNOWN

We don't fear hell, Liam. We have been to New Jersey.

Fear of a Juggalo Planet

That little note you put below the Issue #38 icon was very, very true. Let's just ask this question: is there a phobia for "fear of clowns"? Because I'll NEVER watch the movie *It* again.

CHRISTOPHER HUGHEY ARCADIA, FL

It's called coulrophobia. And it's a devastating illness affecting 83 percent of the PTOM staff and 50 percent of Insane Clown Posse. We plan to march to Burritoville for the cure. Give generously, won't you?

She's Gifted

Nice "The Art of Giving" article (Issue #40). Now just send Christin Chi to me as my present and I'll be happy!

ROB HACKATHORN BEAVERTON, OR

BOZO
NIK NAK

Don't ever send in the clowns. Not ever. Except for Krusty. That guy knows how to employ his comedy Ks.

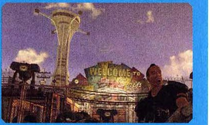
Sorry, Rob. The elemental force known as Christin Chi, much like the wind and the McRib, is no one's property to be bartered or sold.

There's No Crisis

I'd just like to start out by saying I like the new direction you're taking with the magazine. Some issues are hard to digest at times, but I mean that in a good way. Anyway, I'm writing you guys to talk about my *Dino Crisis* experience. A few months ago, I saw *Crisis* for sale on PSN. And since I own the original disc, I figured I'd reminisce by playing it again. I quickly realized why I still have that old disc. Capcom sure had a way with suspense back in the '90s.

I grew up with a love for dinosaurs and being scared sh–tless. What I want is a total remake of *Dino Crisis*. I don't even care if Capcom uses *Resident Evil 5*'s setup; just to be able to

Fallout Over Fallout



Your debate about the bugginess of a game affecting its "greatness" struck a chord (Issue #40).

When *Fallout: New Vegas* came out, I got the PS3 version. It's inexcusable for this game to be as buggy as it is. The tech is all recycled from the first game; these problems should have been solved a long time ago. The occasional lockup is bad enough, but broken quests and flaky, schizophrenic NPC behavior really kill the atmosphere. Instead of fixing these problems, the developers will instead be grinding away on downloadable content packs to rake in even more cash. I for one won't be buying any new content for this game until the basic framework is fixed.

ANDREW HEFFRON EVERETT, WA

We welcome reader photos, letters, and stories ("Submissions"), however, we cannot promise to publish any Submission and none will be returned. Neither PlayStation: The Official Magazine ("PTOM") nor Future US, Inc. shall be liable for loss or damage to any Submission. By sending in your Submissions to PTOM you represent and warrant that you own or otherwise have all necessary rights to the Submissions to allow us to publish them in PTOM and as follows. You grant PTOM a worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive right and fully sub-licensable license to use, copy, distribute, publish, modify, adapt, translate, and store, your Submissions, in any form, format, or medium, of any kind now known or later developed and to use your name, likeness, and any other information in connection with the use of the Submission you provide.

She's getting married. You, dear reader, are likely going to be shot in the head.

step back into Regina's boots in next-gen would be awesome.
JESSE WILLIS **PARTS UNKNOWN**

Dino Crisis 3 for the Xbox was hugely terrible, even though it featured dinosaurs in space. If Capcom can't get dinosaurs in space right, perhaps it's best the franchise went, well, extinct.

We Blame Gremlins

When I saw the new design for PTOM, I was pretty skeptical, but overall I like it with the exception of the way you score your games. The old system of stars over numbers is the best way to judge games. Why did you change it?
DANIEL GAVIN **PARTS UNKNOWN**

Gremlins.

Gremlin Infestation

I finally found more information on *The 3rd Birthday* (Issue #40, page 10). But in the second paragraph, it says *Parasite Eve II* was last seen on the PS2. I'm pretty sure *Parasite Eve II* was on the original PlayStation, not PlayStation 2.
ROSS RAY **NEW ERA, MI**

Again, gremlins. And PTOM apologizes for its error. Parasite Eve II *was released for the original PlayStation. Of course, the writer of the story would also like to offer his most sincere apologies, were he not being fed to jellyfish for something wholly unrelated to* Parasite Eve.

All's Fair

I'm a huge fan of online shooters and a real competitive gamer. So when my best friend laughed at me because I was two prestiges below him in *Modern Warfare 2*, I made it my mission to destroy his rep. I ended up outranking him by five prestiges, and our friendship has been up and down since. With the release of *Black Ops*, I no longer care about my rank, but he is very cautious about playing with me because of our previous engagements in *Modern Warfare 2*.
TELVIS WILSON **PARTS UNKNOWN**

Never let competition get in the way of friendship, T. Elvis. And never let a vampire into your home. He'll eat all the frozen burritos and not even say thanks.

Change Is Good

I'm so glad about Gary's editor's note regarding fan feedback that changed *inFamous 2's* Cole 2.0 into 1.5 (Issue #40). We really do believe that developers must listen to everything we say just because we buy and play their end products. Well, I say that we should be more open-minded to changes so there's the chance we'll be hooked on something new rather than old. Next time don't go throwing a tantrum just because they made changes to our favorite character.
SEAN CHEN **PARTS UNKNOWN**

Ask GREG

Q **First thing I saw when I got the new PTOM (Issue #40) was Greg wearing a chain with Sackboy on it! Where can I get this epic piece of LittleBigBling?**
CHUCK N. **PARTS UNKNOWN**

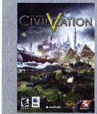
A Not to give away the secrets of propmaster Roger "B." Burchill (the "B," of course, is for bling), who came up with the idea, but the Sackboy chain shown in issue #40's holiday gift guide was just a *LittleBigPlanet* action figure—made by the good folks at Mezco Toys—wired to a novelty plastic gold-colored pimp chain.

Mea Culpa

In Issue #39, we misstated the price of Native Union's Moshi Moshi Retro Handset as $300. The actual price is $59.99. We blame our faulty abacus, which needed new batteries.

Et Cetera

All the other stuff that distracts PTOM



Civilization V

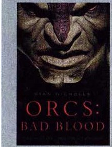
"Take that, former German leader Otto Von Bismarck! The turn-based monster *Civilization V* is now available for the Macintosh, and I will be, shall we say, indisposed for the remainder of the decade."
GREG ORLANDO

Heifer International

"I've run out of things to buy my family for Christmas, so this year I gave a goat in their name. Check out heifer.org to make your own donation!"
SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

ZAGGmate

"The iPad does everything that needs doin' while my butt is planted on the couch—except get my writing done. The ZAGGmate keyboard/case accessory at zagg.com is my game changer. Now I just need to be able to afford an iPad..."
ROGER BURCHILL



Orcs: Bad Blood

"I am now reading another book about orcs. It is the sequel to the aptly named *Orcs*, which is also about orcs. The same orcs in fact. And it is pretty good."
GARY STEINMAN

PSN Best Games

It's the best of the best! Get the lowdown on this month's PSN goodies no one should live without

BEST FULL GAMES

1

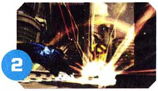
Platforming Puzzle Racer

Joe Danger

A mix of *ExciteBike*-style racing and insane stunt-driven platforming action, this vibrant indie gem shines brightly among the best PSN offerings available. Getting wild and dangerous has never been this awesome.

9

Pub **Hello Games**
Dev **Hello Games**



2

Futuristic Racing

WipEout HD

As with any good remix, *WipEout HD* cannibalizes the best aspects of the high-octane futuristic racing series in order to create one hell of a wild ride that'll knock players' dirty space socks completely off.

9

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **SCE Liverpool**

3

Tricks and Treats

Costume Quest

Sure, it's Halloween themed, but the adventure itself is timeless. With candy and monster smiting in equal measure, this sugary delight is a charming homage to *Final Fantasy X-2*, enhanced by Tim Schafer's unique humor.

9

Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

4

Zen Exploration

Flower

This gorgeous concept game makes blowing hordes of fluttering petals around a lush natural environment into an unforgettable experience that holds up against the biggest triple-A offerings. Don't pass this one up.

9

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

5

Puzzle Shooter

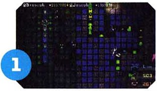
PixelJunk Shooter

The fourth entry in the *PixelJunk* series is easily the best. Saving trapped mining colonists with a versatile, environmental puzzle-solving ship is a creative and challenging affair taxing both the mind and reflexes.

9

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Q-Games**

BEST DEMOS



1

Action Strategy

No Heroes Allowed!

Learn the ropes of crafting the deadliest of dank dungeons to destroy do-gooders in this series of wacky training missions. Slaying the forces of good has never been so entertaining on PSP.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Acquire**

2

Card Battling RPG

Magic Duels of the Planeswalkers

Go head-to-head against Chandra the pyromancer and her challenging wizard successors in this taste of Magic card-battling geekery. Use pre-set decks to punish dark minions.

Pub **Wizards of the Coast**
Dev **Stainless Games**

3

Retro Arcade

Pac-Man Championship Edition DX

Experience Pac-Man in a whole new way with this amped-up Score Attack mode demo. Awake sleeping ghosts, entice a high-speed chase, and then chomp the hell out of 'em. Brilliant fun.

Pub **Namco Bandai**
Dev **Namco Bandai**

4

Third-Person Sci-fi Shooter

Vanquish Challenge Mode

Challenge Mode lives up to its name in this non-stop action fest. Join a team of comrades to battle waves of incoming robot solders and larger monstrosities until victory or death.

Pub **SEGA**
Dev **PlatinumGames**

5

Helicopter Flight Sim

Apache Air Assault

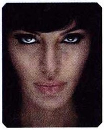
Look, Ma! No wings! After a bit of combat flight training, hop into the cockpit of one sweet airborne death-dealer and dive into two missions to carve up terrorist insurgents on the ground.

Pub **Activision**
Dev **Gaijin Entertainment**

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're watching on our PS3 this month

"Let me guess, you're one of those people who thinks everyone is who they say they are?"



Salt

ETA **January 20** Rated **PG-13** Genre **Drama / Thriller** Studio **Columbia Pictures / Relativity Media**

Certain individuals receive a pass from us when it comes to quirky little issues—like a question of national loyalty. Angelina Jolie is one of those people. As CIA officer Evelyn Salt, Jolie may or may not be a Russian sleeper agent on the verge of being activated to assassinate the president of the United States. Unsure of whom to trust, Salt goes on the run to get to the bottom of her identity crisis. Is it all a setup or is she really a traitor? We're not sure it really matters just as long as we get to watch Jolie in action.

Top VDS Downloads

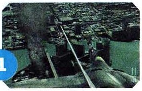
Movies

Inception
The Twilight Saga: Eclipse
Knight and Day
The Expendables
Vampires Suck

TV Shows

Smallville: Season 10
The Walking Dead: Season 1
Supernatural: Season 6
It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia: Season 6
Fringe: Season 3

BEST FREE STUFF



1

Air Combat

Ace Combat

GamesCom Trailer

Dogfights through tight cityscapes filled with exploding buildings and wayward shrapnel debris sets the right tone for some blood-pumping flight action in this adrenaline-fueled teaser.

Pub **Namco Bandai**
Dev **Project Aces**

2

Action Adventure

Lara Croft

Character Pack

Need a break from helping Lara blast her way through ancient chambers? This free character pack unlocks the option to tackle the game's challenging dungeons as criminals Kane and Lynch.

Pub **Square Enix**
Dev **Crystal Dynamics**

3

Brawler

Kung-Fu Live

Trailer

It's hard not to laugh at this ridiculous teaser for *Kung-Fu Live*, but the premise is an awesome one. The PlayStation Eye turns physical movements into on-screen kung-fu fury—an absolutely must-see trailer.

Pub **Virtual Air Guitar Company**
Dev **Virtual Air Guitar Company**

4

Motorcycle Racing

Moto GP 09/10

2010 Updates

The high-speed motorcycle racing action in *Moto GP* gets a 2010 season boost with updated tracks and a slew of new Moto2 and 125cc class bikes and riders. Now go burn some rubber.

Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Monumental Games**

5

Stealth Action

AC: Brotherhood

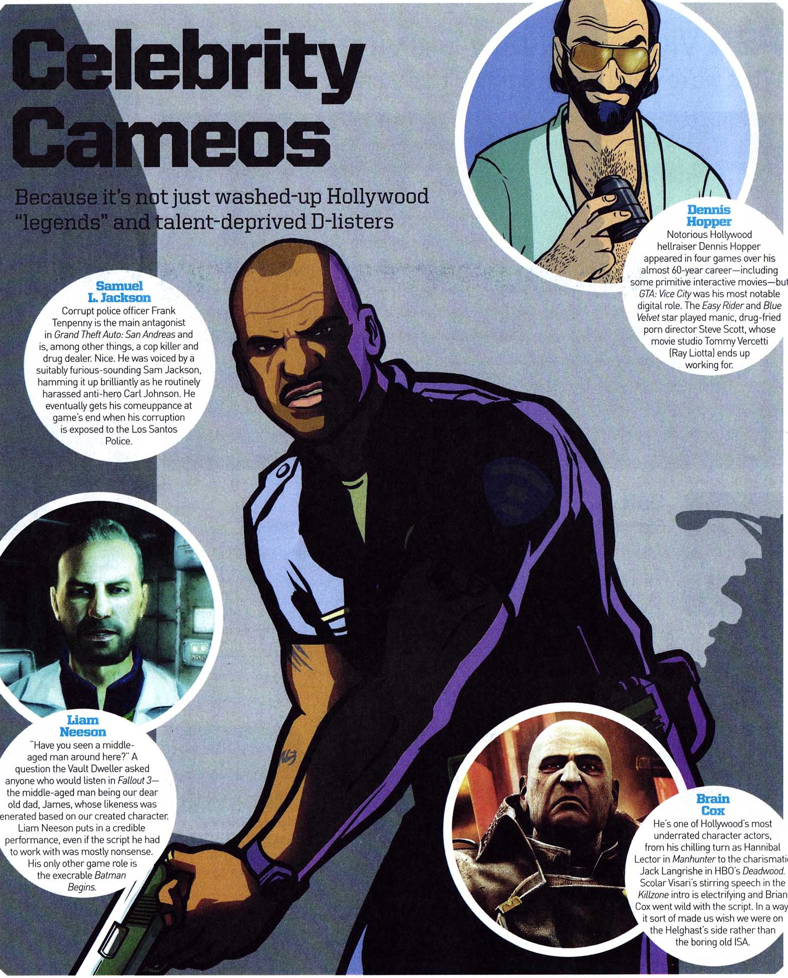
Copernicus

In this free expansion, the Vatican is ticked off at famed astronomer Copernicus for educating folks about science. Help the fellow out in a series of courier, assassination, and protection missions.

Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Ubisoft Montreal**

Celebrity Cameos

Because it's not just washed-up Hollywood "legends" and talent-deprived D-listers



Samuel L. Jackson

Corrupt police officer Frank Tenpenny is the main antagonist in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and is, among other things, a cop killer and drug dealer. Nice. He was voiced by a suitably furious-sounding Sam Jackson, hamming it up brilliantly as he routinely harassed anti-hero Carl Johnson. He eventually gets his comeuppance at game's end when his corruption is exposed to the Los Santos Police.

Dennis Hopper

Notorious Hollywood hellraiser Dennis Hopper appeared in four games over his almost 60-year career—including some primitive interactive movies—but *GTA: Vice City* was his most notable digital role. The *Easy Rider* and *Blue Velvet* star played manic, drug-fried porn director Steve Scott, whose movie studio Tommy Vercetti (Ray Liotta) ends up working for.

Liam Neeson

"Have you seen a middle-aged man around here?" A question the Vault Dweller asked anyone who would listen in *Fallout 3*—the middle-aged man being our dear old dad, James, whose likeness was generated based on our created character. Liam Neeson puts in a credible performance, even if the script he had to work with was mostly nonsense. His only other game role is the execrable *Batman Begins.*

Brain Cox

He's one of Hollywood's most underrated character actors, from his chilling turn as Hannibal Lector in *Manhunter* to the charismati Jack Langrishe in HBO's *Deadwood.* Scolar Visari's stirring speech in the *Killzone* intro is electrifying and Brian Cox went wild with the script. In a way it sort of made us wish we were on the Helghast's side rather than the boring old ISA.

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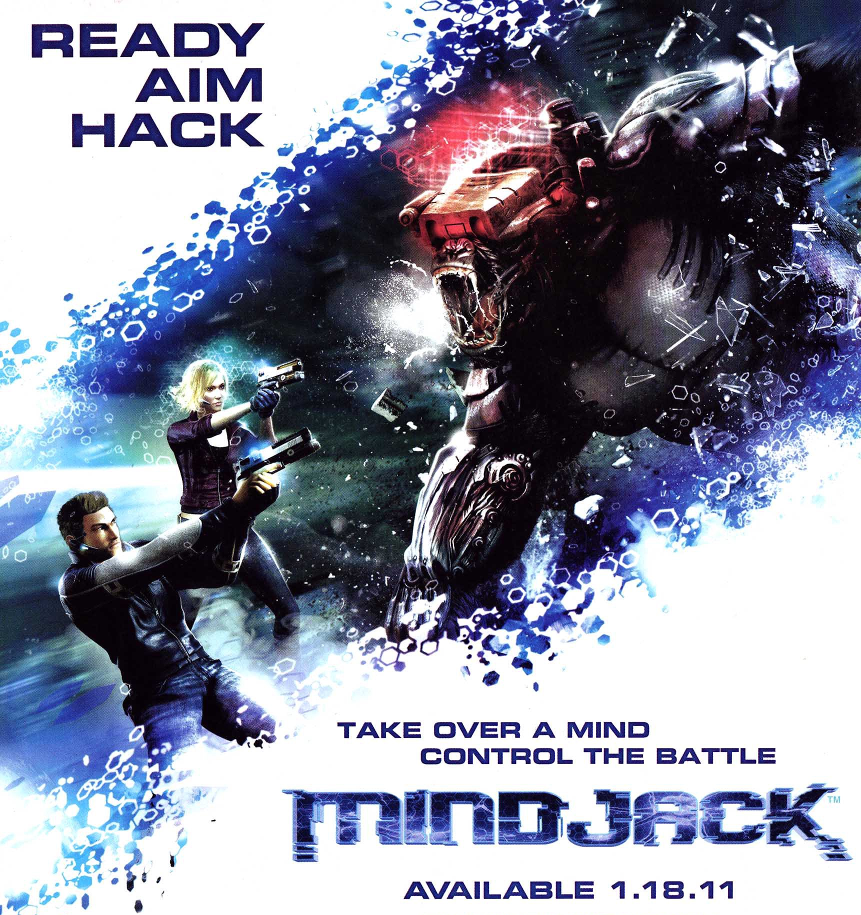

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